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Photograph by
Brent Darby. Styling
by Sian Williams.
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2. Source: The NPD Group Prestige
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FIRST WORDS FROM THE EDITOR



It's October...

...in my view, the second-best month in the British countryside (May comes top). This is a time of contrasts: it can be blowing a gale that will take down trees and slice off roofs or, conversely, it can be quiet, still and suffused with glorious light that illuminates the depths of deciduous woodlands and emphasising the reds, browns and golds of our gardens. It is also the season of Hallowe'en, when our thoughts turn to witches, warlocks and superstitious symbolism. I was fascinated to read Sally Coulthard's piece on page 95 about witch markings and discover something so quirky from our past: I had no idea these mysterious motifs existed and it has left me determined to read Matthew Champion's book on the subject. Armed with a copy, I may decide to stay in one of the haunted properties we feature on page 26 – how better to celebrate this most mystical time of year.

Daisy Smith



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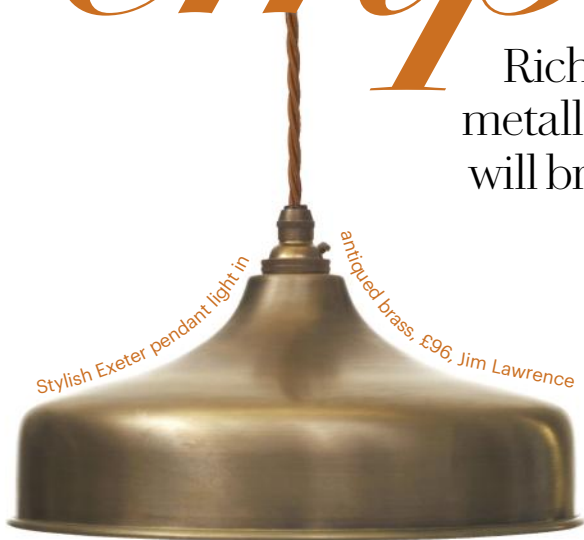


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emporium

Rich tones of forest green, berry red and warm metallics, with evocative woodland-themed prints, will bring the beauty of the season into your home

COMPILED BY ALAINA BINKS



Stylish Exeter pendant light in antiqued brass, £96, Jim Lawrence



Sara Lowes crafts fun animal headaddresses and costume pieces for adults and children, £75 for this owl, Animalesque



Wrap up in this colourful lambswool Penveor cardigan by Seasalt, £79.95

Linen cosmetic bag with a delicate William Morris leaf print, from £16, Heathcote & Ivory



Rattan laundry basket, £35, and bin, £12, Gray & Willow at House of Fraser



Tall Wellington boots in a stylish geometric print, £49.95, Joules



Hand warmer made from wool woven in Yorkshire and filled with wheat and lavender, £29, Indigo & Rose



ADDITIONAL RESEARCH BY HOLLIE BOXALL.
PRICES AND AVAILABILITY CORRECT AT
TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

Lightweight cashmere, cotton, linen and silk-mix scarf, woven in Scotland, £140, Begg & Co



The Burghley leather saddle bag with woven rein strap, from £400*, made to order, Sahel



Seed-head brooch pins made from silver and recycled plastic discs, available in an array of colours, £45 each, Charlotte Whitmore

Lee Jenkins creates unique carvings of waders and woodland birds, from £90, available from LJ Bird Carving



Botanical prints with an aged quality in fir wood frames, £95 for a set of two, Pastel Lane



Burford buttoned-back sofa is available in grey, oatmeal, charcoal and chocolate (shown), £1,299 (large), Country Living Collection by dfs

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Hand-printed linen cushion with a tweed back, £59, Harlow & Hare



Six-cup
bone-china
teapot by Amy
Brown, £75,
Mister Berwyn



This knitted fox toy is individually
made by Lighthouse Knitwear's network
of Ireland-based knitters, £130,
The New Craftsmen



Handmade girl's reversible
woodland print and spot
cotton pinafore dress, from
£24, Bobbi Handmade



Oak & Acorns
hand-printed
wallpaper,
colour mixed
to order, £200/
roll, Anneliese
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i For stockists, see *Where to Buy*

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Three-metre hand-stitched recycled paper garland, £8, East End Press (Glasgow, stand SB9; eastendpress.com)

Bone-china jug hand-decorated in Stoke-on-Trent, from £13, Sophie Allport (London, stand MF27; Glasgow, stand J11; Harrogate, stand C82; sophieallport.com)



The melted natural oil from this lavender and geranium candle can be used to nourish skin, £8.50, Siabann (Glasgow, stand H10; siabann.com)

Hand-cut felt wreath, £27 for 20cm diameter, Rebekah's Attic (Glasgow, stand A11; rebekahsattic.com)



Wool tweed women's jacket, £249, Welligogs (Glasgow, stand F13; welligogs.com)



Vintage armchairs upholstered with a bespoke textile artwork, from £1,200, Rustique Interiors (Glasgow, stand C7; Harrogate, stand M37; rustique.scot)

Colourful checked throw made using the soft fleece from a young alpaca's first clip, £169, So Cosy (Glasgow, stand D2a; Harrogate, stand M54a; socosy.co.uk)



Individually made lambswool scarf using traditional techniques in Scotland, £30, Alan Santry (Glasgow, stand H14; alansantry.co.uk)





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CHRISTMAS FAIRS

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Braided oval rug,
from £65,
The Braided Rug
Company (Harrogate,
stand M59;
braided-rug.co.uk)



Machine-embroidered
tea cosy, £38, Dear Emma
Designs (Harrogate, stand
M74a; dear-emma.com)



Hand-printed-on-wood lazy Susan, £68, Cathy Hilton
Artisan (Harrogate, stand N9; cathyhiltonartisan.co.uk)



Children's knitted mittens,
£12, Bernie and the Beanpole
(Harrogate, stand M72;
bernieandthebeanpole.com)



Jack Russell jug, from £19, Hogben
Pottery (London, stand MF17; Glasgow,
stand D15; Harrogate, stand M35;
janehogbenterracotta.co.uk)



Foot salve handmade in
Wales, £9.60, Bathing
Beauty (Harrogate,
stand C108; bathing-beauty.co.uk)



Vintage fabric
cushions, £27 each,
The Linen Garden
(Harrogate, stand N1;
thelinengarden.co.uk)



Tweed saddle bag with cord strap,
£33.50, Earth Squared (Glasgow,
stand PA12; Harrogate, stand M6;
earthsquared.com)

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CHRISTMAS FAIRS

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Laser-cut and engraved cherry-wood badger and fox brooches, £18.50 each, Shark Alley (London, stand VG20a; sharkalley.co.uk)



Squirrel, acorn and oak leaf necklace handmade in silver, gold vermeil and oak, £145, Phoebe (London, stand MB56a; phoebejewellery.co.uk)



Spot ribbon lampshade, £49, with ivory metal base, £60, Bay Design London, stand MF52; bay-design.co.uk)



Girl's dressing gown, from £49, Em & Lu (London, stand MB74; Glasgow, stand D32; Harrogate, stand C106; emandlu.co.uk)



Handmade solid-silver jewellery inspired by nature. Sterling-silver leaf earrings, £57, Grace and Flora (London, stand VG40; graceandflora.co.uk)



This floral, heart and bird design features on a range of bone-china tableware, including jugs, £12.95-£22.95, Designers Art & Soul (London, stand MB33; Glasgow, stand D21; Harrogate, stand C104; designersartandsoul.com)



Woven using traditional techniques in the UK, this cushion is made from fleeces from Romney Marsh Wool's flock, from £35 (London, stand MB72; romneymarshwools.co.uk)



Cotton napkins with illustrations of vegetables by Lottie Day, £29/six (London, stand MF18; madebylottieday.com)



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A Month in the Country

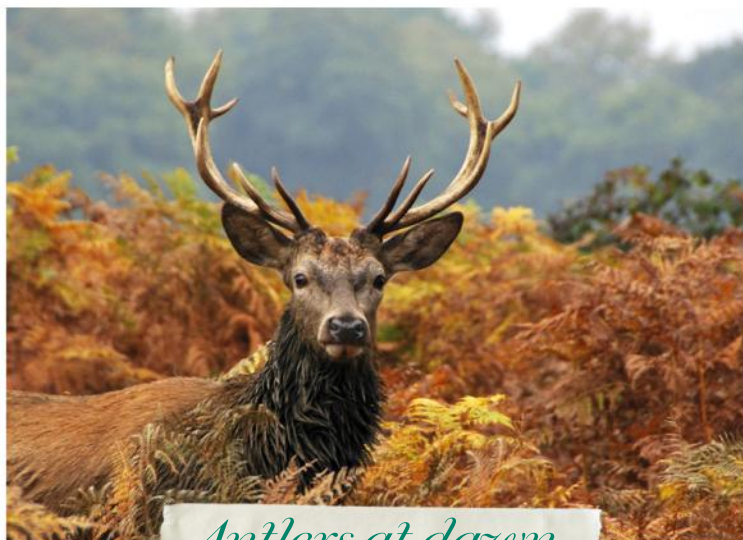
WHAT TO SEE AND DO IN OCTOBER

HEDGEROW TREASURE HUNT



Having waited patiently as the summer sun has ripened nuts and berries, making them plump and sweet, now's the time to grab your trug and make the most of nature's rich pickings. Foraging is a fantastic (and delicious) way to celebrate the season – hazelnuts, blackberries, sloes and crab apples are all on offer and you needn't venture into woodland for a good haul – there's plenty growing in urban areas such as parks, scrubland and even streets. It is also a fun and eco-friendly alternative to filling your trolley with plastic packaging. Just be sure to leave some behind for others and, if in doubt, leave it out. For information and inspiration, read John Lewis-Stempel's *Foraging: The Essential Guide to Free Wild Food* (Constable & Robinson, £6.99).

COMPILED BY LAURAN ELSDEN AND SARAH BARRATT



Antlers at dawn

GET UP EARLY AND GO WALKING through soft mists hanging over moorland and mountainside. As you enjoy the crisp autumnal air, listen out for a deep bellowing that breaks the morning's tranquillity – this is the sound of the magnificent red stag (*Cervus elaphus*) warning rivals away from his harem of females. At the beginning of October the red deer rut is in full swing and the stakes are high as the victor wins the right to mate with his choice of doe. Assertive opponents intimidate each other by roaring, grunting and pawing the ground – as well as loading their antlers with bracken to create an impressive display. If all else fails, it's heads down as antlers crash, pushing and shoving until one stag yields and is chased away. Watch safely from a long distance – with binoculars or telescope to hand – so as not to disturb the herd. For more information, visit wildlifetrusts.org/lovewildlife.

IN THE FIELDS THIS MONTH



For centuries, autumn has been a season for preparing farmland following the harvest. Most ploughs are now pulled by tractor but in some areas you may glimpse Shire horses as they compete in traditional ploughing matches. For details on *Country Living's* Plough to Plate day, visit countryliving.co.uk.

QUIRKY COUNTRYSIDE

Punkie Night



Held in the West Country on October's last Thursday, Punkie Night sees children carrying lanterns – traditionally hollowed-out mangolds or mangelwurzels – march behind their Punkie King and Queen. Legend has it that the lanterns were originally made by wives on the lookout for their inebriated husbands! ➡



A Month in the Country

A simple make...

REPURPOSED DRAWER SHELF

*Upcycle a drawer
from an old piece of
furniture to display
your favourite items*

PROJECT AND STYLING
BY ROS BADGER PHOTOGRAPH
BY RACHEL WHITING

- 1 Remove the handles and knobs from the drawer, then lightly sand.
- 2 Measure the inside width and cut a piece of wood to make a shelf to the same depth.
- 3 Paint the interior, exterior and the shelf with eggshell.
- 4 Line the bottom of the drawer with wrapping or wallpaper, sticking down with a suitable adhesive.
- 5 Once this is dry, place the drawer on its short side and mark the point on the outside edge where you want the shelf to be.
- 6 Drill two holes on either side of the drawer at the point where the shelf will be attached, about 3cm in

from both the front and back edges.

- 7 Slide the shelf in place, and put the tip of a pencil into the drill holes on the drawer to mark the respective places. Remove and drill gently for about 1cm into these marks.

- 8 With the shelf in place, screw

together at all four holes.

- 9 Paint over the ends of the screws.
- 10 Attach mirror plates to the back of the drawer and use to attach to the wall.

Visit beggarsvelvet.london;
[@beggarsvelvetlondon](https://www.instagram.com/beggarsvelvetlondon)
(Instagram)*.



3

COURSES IN CALLIGRAPHY

1

Weekend calligraphy course *Broxbourne, Hertfordshire*

Ideal for beginners, who will learn a calligraphy alphabet, and the more experienced, who can fine-tune their skills. The cost includes a two-night stay. 6-8 October; £385 (020 7834 1066; anglialeisurelearning.co.uk).

2

Learn a script *Cirencester, Gloucestershire*

Letter spacing and layout are the focus of this two-day course, during which you'll practise a font chosen from the wide range available. 21-22 October; £160 (01285 657181; neubreweryarts.org.uk).

3

Gold leaf calligraphy

Leicester, Leicestershire

In this day-long workshop, you'll use gold leaf to create a single initial letter embellished with calligraphy. 28 October; £50 (01162 331850; calligraphyarts.co.uk).



An ingredient to enjoy PUMPKIN

*Designer, cook and author Sophie Conran
shares her favourite seasonal flavour*

I've long been a fan of the mighty pumpkin – for me it conjures up memories of Halloween parties and homemade costumes. This extraordinary vegetable comes in more varieties – such as

'Hooligan' or 'Summer Ball' – than you'll find on supermarket shelves. I love the way how one tiny seed can, once grown, cover metres with its huge leaves. Aside from their use as lanterns, pumpkins are also exceptional to cook with.

Season with olive oil and cumin and roast in the oven, or bake with spices to make a fragrant all-American pie. For more details, see sophieconran.com. ➔



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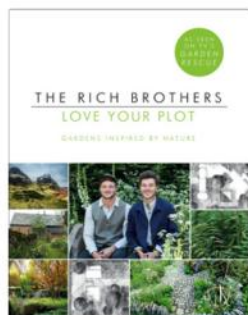
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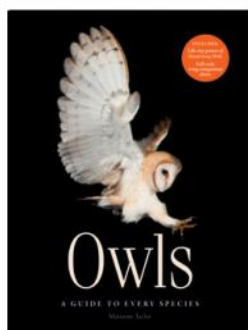
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A BOOK TO READ



Love Your Plot (Penguin, £16.99)

With two Chelsea Flower Show golds under their belts, brothers Harry and David Rich have made a name for themselves in gardening. Taking inspiration from their childhood home in the Brecon Beacons, they show how to work the natural world into a back garden.



Owls: A Guide to Every Species (Ivy Press, £30)

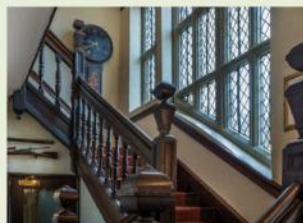
So often seen in books and films, yet so rarely in reality, these mysterious nocturnal birds are the subject of much fascination as icons of wisdom, companions of wizards and harbingers of both good and bad news. Here, Marianne Taylor profiles all known owl species with descriptions and spectacular photos.

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STAY IN... A HAUNTED HOUSE



For historians

The Talbot Hotel, Oundle, Northamptonshire

There's no shortage of interesting moments hidden in this hotel's past (top). Mary Queen of Scots is said to have descended the wooden staircase on her way to the executioner's platform, and its history dates back to the 7th century. *B&B from £82 per night (thetalbot-oundle.com).*



For explorers

Elvey Farm, Pluckley, Kent

The Weeping Wanderer and Red Lady Dering are just two of the spectres said to roam the corridors of Elvey Farm in Pluckley, the UK's 'most haunted village'. Take a break from the supernatural to explore the farm set in 75 acres of Kent countryside. *Double B&B from £90 per night (elveyfarm.co.uk).*



For sceptics

The Mermaid Inn, Rye, E Sussex

With its secret passageways and hidden staircases, the Mermaid has accrued more than 600 years' worth of ghost stories – enough to convince any paranormal naysayer. Steady your nerves with a drink in the Giant's Fireplace Bar, once the haunt of local smugglers. *B&B from £90 per night (mermaidinn.com).*



NEWS YOU CAN USE

BRING ON THE BEES

Bees play a vital role in natural habitats and without them one-third of the food we eat wouldn't be available. With threats including modern farming practices and the varroa mite, there's no better time to help them. Between 23-29 October, the British Beekeepers Association will be hosting National Honey Week, recognising the crucial part bees play in our eco-system. Get involved by planting flowers that provide nectar and pollen, such as lilacs, rosemary and pansies, joining a fundraising scheme or adopting a beehive with Hive Aid (siop.beeswales.co.uk). For more information, visit bbka.org.uk. 



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 For details of more rural houses for sale, visit countryliving.co.uk.

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the good life

Practical ideas and advice for would-be smallholders



How to... GROW WINTER LEAVES

SUMMER MAY BE DRAWING TO A CLOSE, but that doesn't mean you can't still enjoy the benefits of a delicious home-grown green salad. Sow a selection now and you can add fresh, tasty leaves to your dinner plate right the way through to spring – and avoid having to buy costly bags from the supermarket.

Perhaps it's down to their slower growth or the more robust nature of the plants, but many winter greens pack a greater flavour punch than summer salads. So even though you won't be able to grow the same quantities as in the warmer months, just a handful of these leaves makes a tasty partner for rich autumnal dishes.

PLANTING For best results, you need to start sowing now, so that seedlings have a chance to grow and establish a good root structure while the soil is still warm. Continue to plant a batch every few weeks until November for a winter-long supply. If the outside temperature drops, try germinating seeds

TIP

Right up to the first frosts, you can grow marigolds and violas to brighten up your salads

in the warm on a windowsill indoors, before transplanting the seedlings outside.

Winter salads will happily fill the gaps in your vegetable patch left by harvested potatoes, tomatoes or even their summer counterparts. But come October, when the nights start to get colder, you might need to cover younger plants with fleece to protect them from the frost. Although they're fairly hardy, the majority of winter salads will do better in a sunny, sheltered spot where they are protected from the worst of the wind, and will do particularly well in a cold frame or unheated greenhouse. Grow them in containers in a sunny spot near the back door and not only will they benefit from the shelter the house affords, but they'll also be conveniently at hand so you won't be put off from harvesting them by inclement weather.

Wine crates, old Belfast sinks or even windowboxes can be stocked with plants for easy snipping. Fill with a good-quality compost and you'll barely need to

the good life

feed them (they're much slower growing, so less hungry than summer salads), and autumn rain means less time spent watering, too. Just make sure that any pot or container has good drainage – plants will freeze if left standing in pools of water – so raise them up on pot feet (bits of old tiles will also do the job).

HARVESTING You can grow a mix of different varieties (see right) in one container, which makes an attractive display in a windowbox. Or sowing a single variety in each pot is the best option if you're growing some of the mustard varieties or land cress, as they can out-compete other more delicate plants in the container.

Most winter salad leaves are 'cut-and-come-again', which means, with careful snipping, you can get four or five harvests from each plant. Allow them to grow to at least 10cm tall before snipping, leaving at least 3cm at the base. With enough pots or space, by the time you've harvested all the plants, the first ones should have grown back enough, so you can start all over again. 🌱

EAT SHOOTS AND LEAVES



'Micro greens' – plants eaten as seedlings when the leaves or shoots are still small – are easy to grow in seed trays on a sunny windowsill and are ready to harvest in just a few weeks. Try peas for their delicate shoots, or herbs such as basil, coriander, rocket and dill for a tiny but flavoursome hit.



THE BEST WINTER SALAD VARIETIES

Mustard This pungent plant looks great in containers. Try 'Red' or 'Golden Frills' rather than 'Red Giant', which can become too big.

Rocket Sow now and every five weeks for a supply until the first frosts. Many gardeners find it easier to grow at this time of year, as it is less prone to running to seed than in summer.

Mizuna and mibuna These peppery oriental leaves are delicious in salads when eaten young, or in stir-fries when bigger. You can even use the flowering stems of mizuna like broccoli.

Lamb's lettuce As this frost-resistant option is slow-growing, sow now to give it a head start, and pick a few outer leaves from each one at harvest.

Winter purslane This pretty plant is tasty when lightly steamed. Although fairly hardy, it needs protecting with a cloche in bad weather.

Land cress Similar to watercress in taste and texture, it is very easy to grow.

Lettuce Some varieties such as 'Arctic King' and the very resilient 'Valdor' will survive colder weather.



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A lush forest scene with a picnic setup. A large tree trunk is on the left, and a brown tarp is strung between it and another tree on the right. Under the tarp, there is a small wooden table with a blue cloth, holding a basket of fruit, a white pitcher, and two red mugs. A small wooden stool with a red cloth and a single apple sits next to it. A wicker basket lies on the ground in the foreground. The ground is covered in fallen leaves, and the background is filled with green foliage.

Catch a *falling* LEAF

As trees start to take on rich autumnal shades, be uplifted and inspired by a seasonal woodland walk

WORDS AND STYLING BY SIAN WILLIAMS • PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRENT DARBY



WOODLAND FINDS

Make a cotton canopy shelter in the woods with long lengths of twine tied tightly at each corner of a piece of cloth. Wind around well-spaced tree trunks, securing with a knot.

Opposite Basket, from £8; **folding table**, from £15; **stools**, from £5 each: all Morgan's. **Vintage Welsh blanket**, from a selection, Jane Beck Welsh Blankets. **Canopy** in Ruskin linen, £66/m, Morris & Co. **Thick natural twine** (hanging canopy and on

stool), £3.45 (16m), Pipii. **On folding table Trug**, £43, The Truggery. **Decorative wooden platters** (28cm), £8 each, Hobbycraft. **Cloth** in Ruskin slate linen, as before. **Jam jar**, £3; enamel mugs, £6.50 each: all Labour and Wait. **Feathers**, from £1 (for ten), Norpar. **Vintage cream jug and soda siphons**, all from a selection, Trecastle Antique Centre. **Cushion** (on stool) in Harvest Hare by Mark Hearld, in charcoal/natural linen,

£66/m, St Jude's. **Knitted pot-holder** (on small stool) made from Sirdar Wash 'n' Wear Crepe DK yarn in Spice Pumpkin and Harvest, £2.70 (50g); Unique Yorkshire Skipton double knit yarn, £4 (50g); Sirdar Gallop Harrap Tweed double knit yarn, £3 (for 50g); DMC Woolly merino wool in red, £3.50: all Hobbycraft. **This page Red jute twine**, £2.10 (approx 40m), Pipii. All other details, as before ➔



RICH WOOD AND STONE

Create a cosy corner where you can paint, write or draw.

Left Vintage **bureau**, **chair** and **waste-paper basket**, all from a selection, Treacastle Antique Centre. Vintage **jugs**, **bowls**, **plate**, black **trinket box** and **stone pigs**, all from a selection, McCartneys.

Houses made from Fimo soft caramel modelling clay, £2.30 (7g); painted in Marabu porcelain paint, £3: all Hobbycraft.

Postcards, from 70p each; **handmade paper**, from £4 (for 20 A6 sheets): all Paperchase. Similar **paper spike**, from £1.18, ebay. **Jam jar**, £3, Labour and Wait. **Feathers**, from £1 (for ten); **Chinese lanterns**, £7.50 (for ten): all Norpar. Ruby No 10 vintage chalk **paint** (in jam jar), £5.99/125ml, London Vintage Paint Company. Enamel **mug**, £6.50, Labour and Wait

VINTAGE STYLING

Use old crates as tables, stools and for foraged finds.

Bottom left Vintage **crate**, £8, Morgan's. Vintage **blanket**, from a selection, Jane Beck Welsh

Blankets. Grey **twine**, similar from Nutscene. Red **jute twine**, £2.10 (approx 40m); thick natural **twine**, £3.45 (16m): both Pipii

CONKERS AND LEAVES

Arrange conkers and cones to make a striking display.

Below Lilliput **magazine**, from £2.56, Amazon. Decorative wooden **platter**, £8, Hobbycraft. Copper **tealight**, £5.99 (for two); cypress **cones**, £4.25 (250g): both Pipii. All other details, as before

TOASTED MALLOW STICKS

Strip the bark from twigs and soak in water overnight to make toasting sticks.

Bottom **Kettle**, from £15, Preloved. Similar ram's-head **poker**, £80.50, Anvil Forge Blacksmithing.

Swedish **log**, £8; vintage **crate**, £8; **basket**, from £8; **table**, £15; **stool**, from £5: all Morgan's.

Enamel **mugs**, as before. Copper **saucepan**, £61.99, Lakeland. Knitted **pot-holder**, details as before. Vintage **blanket**, from a selection, Jane Beck Welsh Blankets





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SEASONAL PLEASURES

Create a welcoming, autumnal atmosphere with a blazing fire, warming drinks and textural knitted accessories.

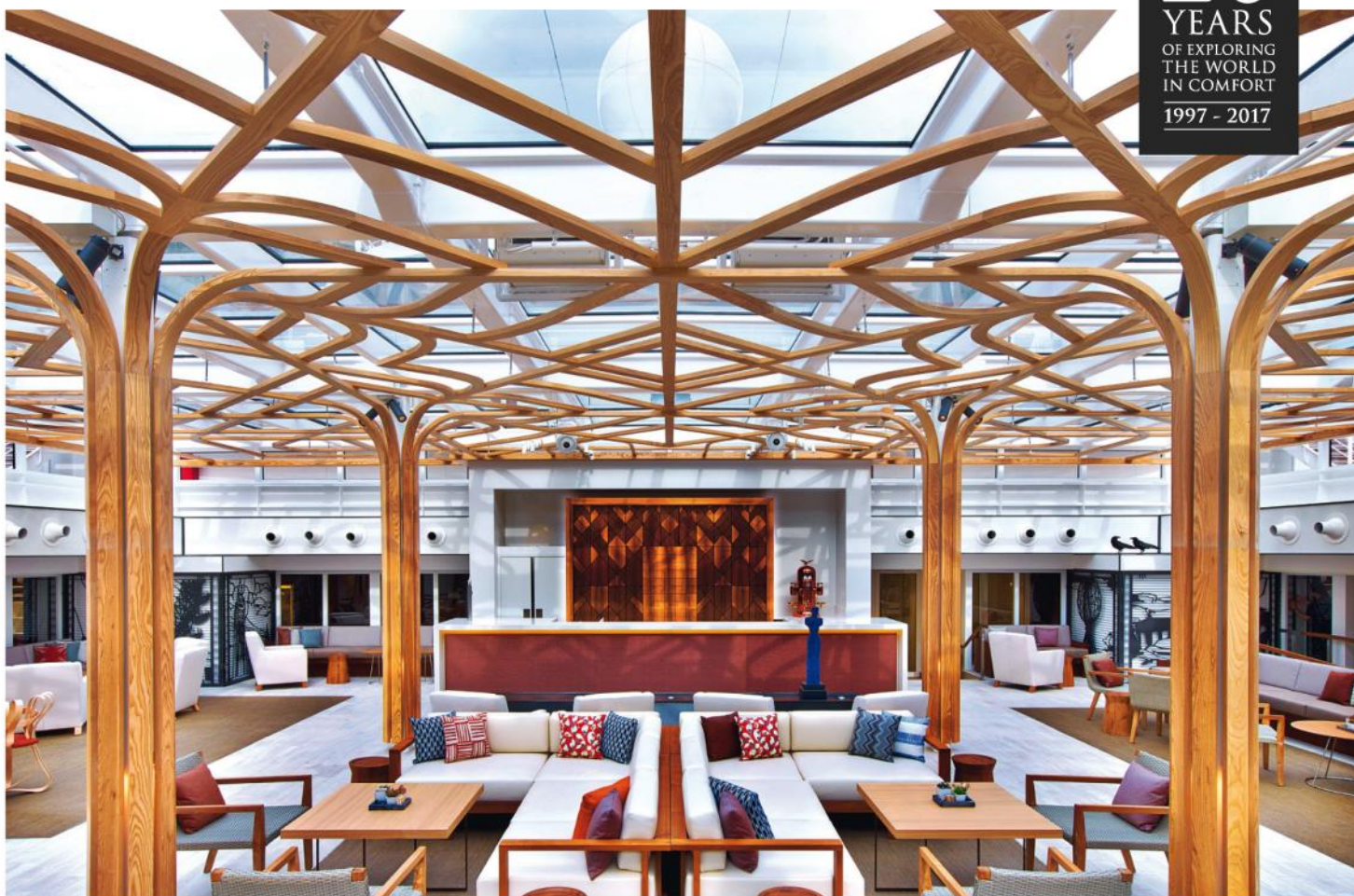
650 **woodburner**, from £1,686, Clearview Stoves. Enamel **mug**, £6.50; Japanese enamel **kettle**, £65; both Labour and Wait. Knitted **pot-holder** made from DMC Woolly merino wool in red, £3.50 (50g); Sirdar Wash 'n'

Wear Crepe DK yarn in Spice Pumpkin and Harvest, £2.70 (50g); Yorkshire Skipton double knit yarn, £4 (50g); Sirdar Gallop Harrap Tweed double knit yarn, £3 (50g); decorative **wooden platter** (28cm), £8, Hobbycraft.

Stool, from £5; vintage galvanized **tub**, £6; both Morgan's ➔



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SEASONAL INSPIRATION



AUTUMN COLOUR PALETTE

If you like to draw and paint, be inspired by the shades of the season and build up a collection of complimentary hues you can use. .

Old **desk blotter**, from a selection, McCartneys. **Pencils**, from 75p each, Paperchase. **Chinese lanterns**, £7.50 (for ten), Norpar



PAINTED LEAVES

Scatter glycerine-preserved autumn leaves on a table or arrange them in a bowl. Decorate with white acrylic paint, following the lines of their veins in dots or stripes.

Leaves preserved with Value Heath Glycerine BP, £1.39/200ml, Boots. Painted in Daler Rowney Graduate Titanium white acrylic **paint**, £3.60/120ml, Hobbycraft



FOLIAGE GARLAND

Make a leaf decoration using felted wool embroidered in chain and running stitch and hang on a length of twine.

Leaves made from felt in leaf putty and grey marl, both £54/m, Kirkby Design. Embroidered in DMC Tournesol natural cotton yarn; DMC Safran natural cotton yarn, both £3.50 (50g): both Hobbycraft. Jute **twine**, £2.10 (40m), Pipii



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RUSSET POT-HOLDER

In autumn-toned wools, use a simple garter stitch to knit a pot-holder and back with cotton ticking.

DMC Woolly merino **wool** in red, £3.50 (50g); Sirdar Wash 'n' Wear Crepe DK **yarn** in Spice Pumpkin and Harvest, £2.70 (50g); **knitting needles**, £2.17; **wooden platter**, £8; Unique Yorkshire Skipton **yarn**, £4 (50g); Sirda Gallop Harrap Tweed **yarn**, £3 (50g): all Hobbycraft



FEATHER DISPLAY

Collect feathers on walks and arrange by hammering small holes into a log and pushing in the quills.

Feathers, from £1 (for ten), Norpar. Antique **hammer**, from a selection, Old Tools and Collectables. Vintage **mug**, £3, Morgan's. Thick natural **twine**, £3.45 (16m), Pipii. 650 **woodburner**, from £1,686, Clearview Stoves



PAINTED TEXTILES

Make a comfortable window seat with a mix of cushions in leafy prints and painted fabrics in shades of nut and rich red.

Seat in tomato wool, £54/m, Kirkby Design. **Cushion** in Harvest Hare by Mark Heard, £66/m, St Jude's. **Cushion** in Bramble bullrush linen, £59/m; **cushion** in Ruskin slate linen, £66/m: both Morris & Co. Dylon fabric paint (for acorn), £3/25ml, Hobbycraft. **Wool**, as before ➡



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INTO THE WOODS

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Vintage galvanized **tub**, £6; vintage **mug**, £3: both Morgan's. Window seat **cushion** made from Cell Tomato wool, £54/m, Kirkby Design. **Cushion** (on window seat) in Bramble Bullrush linen, £59/m, Morris & Co. Vintage **chairs** and **dining table**, from a selection, McCartneys. French linen

tea towels (over chair), £15 each; red enamel **mugs**, £6.50; **jam jars**, £3; large enamel **jug**, £24: all Labour and Wait. Cream **jug** and **soda siphons**, from a selection, Trecastle Antiques. Decorative **wooden platters** (28cm), £8 each, Hobbycraft. **Chinese lanterns**, £7.50 (for ten), Norpar. **Cushion** (on chair) in Harvest Hare charcoal/natural linen by Mark Hearld, £66/m, St Jude's

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Sophie August





Setting up SHOP

Selling her illustrations at the *Country Living Fair* 21 years ago inspired Sophie Allport to launch a range of homeware. Now she is opening her own store

WORDS BY LAURAN ELSDEN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER

A short walk from the railway station, past a miscellany of stone and timber-framed buildings, is Stamford High Street, a bustling thoroughfare where discerning shoppers can peruse an assortment of shops, cafés and market stalls. At the top of the road, opposite St Michael's Church – an impressive example of gothic architecture – is an attractive shop front of pale grey and glass: number 26, now home to Sophie Allport's flagship store.

A slight chill lingers in the air outside, while inside stacks of cable-knit throws and cushioned pet beds – adorned with Labradors, dachshunds and terriers – create a warm and welcoming atmosphere. "I used to come to Stamford with my mum as a child, so it's really nostalgic for me," Sophie says from behind the counter. "For years I'd walk past this shop and imagine how I'd decorate it or what I'd put in the window displays." After completing a degree in graphic



RURAL BUSINESS



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Sophie's delicate Swallow motif features on beautiful bone china; her store sells an array of products, including blinds, oven gloves, bags, cushions and dog beds; she pays great attention to detail in her illustrations



art and design at Leeds Metropolitan University, Sophie moved to London where she worked as an illustrator for some of the capital's most prestigious companies. In 1996, she was invited to give a demonstration at the Country Living Spring Fair – an opportunity that would prove pivotal in establishing Sophie Allport as a household name: "I thought I'd better have a few bits and pieces to sell," she says, "so I decided to paint some sunflowers – people were wanting to buy them from me faster than I could work! That sowed the seed and it all really took off from there."

Sophie soon returned to the CL Fair not as a demonstrator but as an exhibitor – using the events to hone her craft and gather valuable feedback from customers. Then, in 2007, with the help of her brother Gem, she launched the business officially. "Gem is an accountant by trade and I'm the dizzy artist, but we work really well together."

With the business up and running, Sophie and Gem returned to their native Lincolnshire, where they set up shop in an empty room above Gem's garage. "One of our biggest challenges was finding a new office," Sophie says. "It's a big risk renting a property with a long-term lease – you have to think about how you are going to pay for it."

Ten years later and the shop, which opened earlier this year, is a world away from those original premises. "I've always loved the quirky character of the building,"

Sophie says. "It's Grade II-listed so we couldn't make too many changes, but it's been fun just to work with the space." Though Sophie initially worried she might not have enough stock to fill the surprisingly cavernous interior, she's since found that the numerous nooks and crannies, as well as the large open rooms upstairs and down, are perfect for showcasing her catalogue of quintessentially British products, the designs for which she still hand-paints, often at her kitchen table: "There's a little alcove opposite the foot of the stairs and as soon as I saw it I envisaged an antique writing desk and ornate mirror – an ideal way to exhibit my hearts range."

Upstairs, via a spiral staircase carpeted in seagrass, an absorbed shopper inspects a table-top display of fine-bone-china crockery (which has been hand-painted in Stoke-on-Trent), delicate egg cups and patterned napkins. "I love talking to my customers; they say exactly what they're thinking," Sophie laughs. "It's so important for me to listen and take on board their feedback. That's how you learn and grow."

A perfectionist when it comes to colour, Sophie has chosen muted tones of grey, blue and green to decorate the interior. Carefully selecting furniture and ornaments to incorporate among her merchandise – button-back chairs and vases with flowers from her country garden – she has created a look in her shop that is coveted by



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her customers: "We're all about making a house a home, so I want people to picture my products in their own."

Since launching the business, Sophie's designs have become increasingly popular, so much so that she is now stocked in John Lewis and has been commissioned by clients including Ascot, Wimbledon and the Chelsea Flower Show. "I love gardening," she says, wrapping a pheasant-print scarf round a ladder propped up against the wall. "I find it so inspirational to be back in London, surrounded by so many beautiful gardens." Recently Sophie has even returned to the stage at the CL Fairs, this time not to demonstrate her craft but to share her experiences of running a successful business: "Public speaking has never been my strong point, but it's important to push yourself out of your comfort zone and it felt almost serendipitous to be back where it all began."

With the last of the customers making their purchases, five o'clock signals the end of the working day. For Sophie this means locking up and driving the four miles home to where her sons Max, 12, Freddie, ten, and Arthur, seven, will no doubt be waiting. "Living in the country is a constant source of inspiration and it's lovely to see it all through my boys' eyes, too. They're so enthused by the world outside. When they're excited by something, it's contagious," she says. "The other day it was hedgehogs in the garden, which made me think, 'Perhaps they'll be the next addition to the Sophie Allport range'."

i To learn more about Sophie's products and her shop, visit sophieallport.com. See her at the Country Living Christmas Fairs (London, stand MF27; Glasgow, stand J11; Harrogate, stand C82).



The pale muted tones of the store complement Sophie's collection and the colour palette of her own home (above)



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PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID BRITTAIN; GAP INTERIORS/PIOTR GESICKI; MARK SCOTT. *THE PRIZE IS REDEEMABLE AGAINST A KITCHEN PURCHASE ONLY. FOR T&CS, SEE THE WEBSITE

Whether you long for sleek, modern handleless cabinets with granite worktops or prefer a more classic look with traditional stone flooring, we'd love to know which kitchen style is your idea of perfection. And when it comes to choosing where to buy, would you rather rely on the expertise of a local independent retailer or opt for the vast choice available at a well-known national brand?

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COUNTRY LOVING

As some unexpected guests appear at the farm, Imogen Green realises that moving on is easier said than done

I HAD A SURPRISE LAST WEEK. Some straw bales were delivered from up-country, and right in the middle of the stack, looking startled, were four kittens – all with grey fur and wide green eyes. It was sad to think of their poor, bereft mother but I couldn't help being delighted. They soon made themselves at home in the kitchen, our elderly terrier watching mournfully as they took over his basket. Ever since, they've been exploring: startling the cows in the parlour, falling into water troughs and sneaking into cars. I've already had to cancel two shopping trips because of a stowaway purring in the back.


This morning, when the hedge-layer arrived, I warned him to keep an eye on his van – I'm starting to think that the kittens can walk through walls, they're so good at getting everywhere. After milking I went to help him in the field beside the road. He can work much faster with me dragging sawn-off branches out of the way. I had another motive, too: since my attempts at romance with my neighbour, Matthew Antiza, have stalled, my sister-in-law has been urging me to start dating again. And the hedge-layer is single and attractive, in a sweet-faced, rural way, with golden hair and deep smile lines. He's known locally as Frank Pudding, because he once had a pudding-basin haircut at school. As he says, "A village never forgets!"

Another thing a village never does is ignore you when you work beside the road. While Frank talked about his favourite subject – squirrels – passing cars tooted approvingly at us. Just as I was learning that if you put your finger into a drey, a baby squirrel will grip it tightly, the postman came over to critique what we'd done. A number of walkers also wandered up to watch as Frank chopped wood, bending and laying down saplings as if weaving a giant basket round the edge of the field. I sensed one walker studying me as I dragged brushwood to a bonfire. His dark eyes were oddly familiar. I realised why when he introduced himself as Matthew's older brother, Carlos. "How's Matthew?" I asked. "Awkward – as usual," he said, laughing. "He's so prickly that I don't think I'll ever really get to know him," I said. "Don't be so sure about that," Carlos replied. "The men in our family take a long, long time to make up their minds. But once they do, it's for ever."

It was suddenly a very serious conversation. I'd have liked to know more, but just then I saw a grey, furry shape flit across the road, and had to devote the next half hour to catching an escaped kitten. When I got back, Carlos had gone, and Frank was bent over, clutching his thigh as blood welled from a chainsaw cut. He refused to be driven to A&E, and instead hobbled into my kitchen, tore off his trousers, asked for a needle and thread, and proceeded to sew himself up. He was only showing what a tough survivalist he was, but any interest I might have had in him died right then:

I don't enjoy shuddering with horror, hands over my eyes, as someone mashes fresh garlic into an open wound to sterilise it. It was a relief when the doorbell rang. It was Matthew.

"We need to talk..." he began, looking agitated before he noticed there was a trouserless man in my kitchen. "First you kiss the vet, then this!" he exclaimed. "I give up! I've never met such a hardened flirt!" He left, slamming the door behind him. Frank left, too, and I began to feel rather annoyed. Why did Matthew always assume the worst about me?

The doorbell went. To my astonishment it was Matthew again, looking shamefaced. "What do you want now?" I said, crossly. He opened his hands to reveal... a purring ball of fur. 



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Love in the Countryside, inspired by Country Living's ongoing campaign to match up country-lovers, will air in January 2018. Visit countryliving.co.uk to find out more.

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DESIGNS AND PROJECTS BY ELIZABETH HARBOUR
STYLING BY BEN KENDRICK AND ALAINA BINKS ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY PENNY WINGER

CRAFT IDEAS *to inspire*

THIS MONTH: FABRIC



APPLIQUÉD DRAUGHT EXCLUDER

Made from hessian and felt, with a charming folk-art-style scene, this is both pretty and practical.

YOU WILL NEED

Fabric scissors

Hessian fabric 100cm x 180cm (or altered to the size required)

Pencil

Paper or lightweight card

Tracing paper

Wool felt squares – burgundy, ginger, gold, olive, black, grey and cream/ivory

White tailor's chalk pencil

Non-stick baking parchment

Fabric glue

Embroidery thread – light green, mid green, beige

Sewing needle and pins

Sewing machine

Clean clothes/rags

Beige sewing thread

- 1 Cut the hessian into four pieces, each 45cm x 100cm.
- 2 Draw and cut out templates of hills, trees, a horse, house, fence and blackbirds from paper or lightweight card. Alternatively, print and trace the ones from elizabethharbour.co.uk.
- 3 Using the templates, cut the shapes out from felt. You will need to use a white chalk pencil to draw around the templates on the dark felt so the lines are visible.

- 4 Lay one piece of hessian with parchment paper behind it on a flat, clean surface.
- 5 Measuring 10cm up from the bottom edge of the panel and 6cm in from both side edges, glue down a gold felt hill by applying little blobs of fabric glue evenly to the back. (If you have changed the scale of this draught excluder, you may want to lay out the whole design first to ensure all the pieces will fit.)
- 6 Repeat with the two olive hills, sticking these so they overlap the edge of the gold hills.
- 7 Glue the house in place, overlapping the dip in the middle of the olive hills, then the door, doorframe and window surrounds.
- 8 Continue with the windows, roof, and chimneys, before gluing on the trees and horses.
- 9 Position and glue the horizontal bars of the fence either side of the house so there is a 1.5cm space between each one.
- 10 Glue the vertical fence posts at both ends of each fence and then the others evenly spaced between.
- 11 Position and glue the blackbirds in place.
- 12 Once dry, remove the parchment paper from behind.
- 13 Cut two 60cm threads from a skein of beige embroidery thread. Knot one end of each together to make it double in thickness. Use to create the window panes by sewing two long vertical stitches

followed by three (or two for the smaller windows) shorter horizontal stitches, and sew single stitches on the horses to make an eye.

- 14 Use the green threads, doubled as before, one colour at a time to embroider the tree branches using a backstitch.
- 15 Once finished, place this panel face-down onto another strip of hessian and pin together.
- 16 Tack a hem 6cm in from all edges and sew along this line using a sewing machine. Leave a 9cm opening at one corner and turn right-side out.
- 17 Sew the remaining two panels together in the same way, again leaving a 9cm opening at the same corner, to create an inner liner. Turn right-side out.
- 18 Push the inner liner inside the outer cover, being sure to hold and match up the openings of both pieces.
- 19 Fill the inner liner with old clean clothes, rags or socks.
- 20 Once evenly full, sew the inner liner opening closed by hand using the beige thread.
- 21 To finish, turn in the edge of the outer cover and sew the opening closed with over-hand stitch with the same thread.



BLOCK-PRINTED CLOTH

A striking hand-embellished fabric can be used as a tablecloth, cushions or a curtain in a glazed cabinet. Print in small quantities at a time to experiment with different colourways and designs.

YOU WILL NEED

Pencil

Sheet of A4 tracing paper

Factis print block (available from greatart.co.uk)

Cutting mat

Small set of lino-cutting tools

Metal ruler and craft knife

Medium-weight cotton or calico fabric

Sheets of newspaper/magazine

Green Speedball screen-printing ink for fabric (available from handprinted.co.uk)

Old dinner plate and teaspoon for mixing paint

Sponge/foam roller

- 1 Draw out a design in pencil on tracing paper. Alternatively, print and trace this design from elizabethharbour.co.uk.
- 2 Turn over the tracing paper so it lies face down on the print block. Transfer the design by retracing the image. Remove the paper.
- 3 With the print block on a cutting mat, slowly and gently carve (away from yourself) over the pencilled lines using lino-cutting tools, holding the block steadily with your other

hand behind your cutting one. If you've not tried lino-cutting before, practise your technique on a test piece of block first.

- 4 Start with a 2U blade to carve over the leaf outline.
- 5 Use a 3U blade for the large dots, holding the blade over each one and slowly turning the block one full turn while applying a little pressure.
- 6 Use a V cutter to carve away the lines at the corners of the block.
- 7 The oak leaf design is divided into two halves. For the negative side, use a V cutter to carve away the spine/vein details and a 2U cutter for the smaller dots. For the positive side of the design, carve round the spine details and dots, cutting away the block and leaving the spine details intact.
- 8 Brush the block with your hand to remove any loose pieces.
- 9 Using a metal ruler and craft knife, cut around the square edges of the design to make a smaller block.
- 10 Draw an arrow on the back of the block to mark the top so you know if it is the right way up when you start to print.
- 11 Iron the cotton or calico and lay it on a flat wipeable work surface (such as a PVC tablecloth).
- 12 Place your printing block on a sheet of newspaper/magazine and spoon two teaspoons of green ink onto the plate. Gently move the roller over the

ink until it is evenly covered and makes a wispy sound.

- 13 Roller the ink lightly over the block until covered. Starting at the top left-hand corner, line the block up with the straight edges of the fabric and print. Press down on the back of the block with even pressure using the palm of your hand, being careful not to move the block.
- 14 Place the block on a fresh sheet of newspaper/magazine and cover with ink as before.
- 15 Print the next block down a row, touching the top-left corner of the block with the bottom right-hand corner of the previous printed square. Apply more ink as before, using a new piece of newspaper.
- 16 Print the next block up on the first row, touching the bottom left-hand corner of the block with the top right-hand corner of the previous printed square. Repeat along the top two rows to create a checkerboard effect.
- 17 Continue until you have covered the piece of fabric.
- 18 Allow to dry and follow the fixing instructions for the ink. ➔





CRAFTY CAT CUSHION

Create this distinctive character using simple stitching and easy-to-do paint effects.

YOU WILL NEED

Pencil (soft)
A2 paper
Tracing paper
Scissors
Calico piece 50cm x 147cm
Pins and fabric scissors
Fabric paint – white, yellow, crimson and black
Old plate (for mixing paint)
Round-tip hog brush or stencil brush
Black and red embroidery thread
Sewing needle and tailor's chalk
Sewing machine
Hollow fibre filling (or toy stuffing)
Cream thread

- 1 Draw an outline of a cat (approximately H41cm x W25cm) onto an A2 piece of paper or tracing paper. Once you're happy with the design, draw a 3cm border (seam allowance) around it and cut out.
- 2 Fold the calico in half. Pin the paper template to the front and cut around it. Remove the pins to leave a paper template and two cat-shaped pieces of calico.
- 3 Place the two pieces of calico next to each other symmetrically – the back

of the cat will be on the left and the front on the right.

- 4 Mix together a little white and yellow fabric paint on an old plate and stipple onto the right-hand piece (the front) for the cat's back, tummy and hind leg. Stipple the same colour on the back of the cat as well as onto the head and ears on the left-hand piece. Leave to dry.
- 5 Mix crimson fabric paint into the remainder of the light yellow, adding a little more white or yellow if necessary to make a salmon-pink colour.
- 6 Using this, stipple a 5cm-wide circle in the centre of the cat's face and the ears on the front piece. Leave to dry.
- 7 Stipple black lightly over all the yellow areas on both pieces and to the edges of the pink ears on the front piece.
- 8 Mix together a little white with the black to make grey. Stipple this to the cat's paws on both pieces.
- 9 Using a soft pencil, draw out the cat's face onto tracing paper. Trace over the back of the paper drawing and position the cat's face the right way round onto the fabric panel (over the pink circle). Transfer the design by rubbing with the side of the pencil.
- 10 To sew each eye, tease apart the strands of one thread from a skein of black embroidery thread. Knot together the ends of two 35cm cut strands to make the thread double in thickness.
- 11 On the right-hand piece of fabric (the front), make a stitch at the corner of one eye, drawing the needle up through the fabric a stitch-length away and then pushing the needle back down through the end of the previous stitch to create a backstitch.
- 12 Backstitch around the eyes and fill in the pupils with flat stitch.
- 13 Using another two 35cm strands of thread as before, backstitch the whiskers.
- 14 Using another two 40cm strands of thread as before, backstitch the outline of the nose and fill it in with a flat stitch.
- 15 Using another two 30cm strands of thread as before, backstitch the dividing line between the cat's legs.
- 16 Use a 65cm length of thread (a whole thread this time, not strands as before) to backstitch the cat's curling tail.
- 17 Use a 25cm piece (a whole thread this time, not strands as before) to stitch the paws.
- 18 Draw a light outline of the cat's neck ribbon in pencil or tailor's chalk on both panels with a bow at the front. Using a 95cm piece of red embroidery thread (a whole thread this time, not strands as before) for the front panel and a 70cm piece of red thread (a whole thread this time, not strands as before) for the back panel, backstitch over this line on both pieces.
- 19 Put the two pieces of fabric right sides together and pin.
- 20 Pencil a line around the edge of the cat 1.5cm in from the edges and machine sew together along it. Leave a 6cm opening at the bottom edge. Cut two small V notches on edge of fabric where inner corners of ears meet the head.
- 21 Turn the cat right side out and stuff with hollow fibre by pushing it through the opening at the bottom.
- 22 Sew the opening closed by hand using the cream thread and an overhand stitch to finish. ➔

VEGETABLE
PRINT RIBBON

See overleaf for instructions



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VEGETABLE PRINT RIBBON

Make your own stylish allotment-themed ribbon using homemade stamps cut from a turnip. Embellish a present, decorate the edges of shelves in a kitchen or use as a trim on a curtain or blind.

YOU WILL NEED

Vegetable or small sharp knife
Fresh large turnip (or a potato will also work)
Kitchen roll
Black pastel pencil (I used Conté à Paris available from hobbycraft.co.uk)
Cutting mat
Small set of lino-cutting tools
Newspaper
5cm-wide cotton tape (available from textileexpressfabrics.co.uk)
Old plate (for mixing paint)
Fabric paint – white, yellow, green, purple, orange (I used Pebeo Setacolor available from cassart.co.uk)

Two medium round paintbrushes
Scrap piece of fabric (for testing on)

- 1 Slice the turnip widthways into 3cm-thick slices and dab them with a piece of kitchen roll until dry.
- 2 Using the black pastel pencil, draw out a vegetable design – for example, a carrot, turnip, cabbage or leek, making sure each design fits within the width of the ribbon.
- 3 Add detail to the vegetables by drawing extra lines inside the shapes.
- 4 Place the piece of turnip on a cutting mat. Slowly carve away the pencil lines using a V blade from a set of lino-cutting tools, cutting away from yourself and holding the turnip steadily with your other hand behind the one you are working with.
- 5 Once you're happy with the design, following the carved edge of the vegetable shape cut out the stamp using a sharp knife.
- 6 Remove any turnip from the lino-cutting tools.
- 7 Dry the vegetable stamps on kitchen paper for an hour.
- 8 Lay newspaper on a flat, clean work surface and lay the cotton tape on top, unraveled and flat.
- 9 Mix the fabric paints on an old plate. Use white, yellow and a little orange for the body of the turnip and purple for the top; green for the leek and orange and green for the carrot.
- 10 Lightly paint the stamps in the right colour/s and test print onto a scrap of fabric. Try out different arrangements and angles, swiftly adding more paint after each print.
- 11 When you're happy, start printing onto the cotton tape, repeating one or a couple of shapes to make different patterns.
- 12 Leave to dry.



Printmaker, illustrator, designer and crafter Elizabeth lives with her husband Llewellyn, 18-year-old daughter Esme and 15-year-old son Samuel in Watlington, Kent. She runs classes and workshops from

Nettlestead Village Hall, Kent and Bells Yew Green Village Hall in East Sussex. For more inspiration and information, visit elizabethharbour.co.uk, where you will also find a selection of her handmade pieces available to buy.

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Kitchen Table Talent

THIS MONTH: THE CARMARTHENSHIRE
LEATHER WORKERS



In this series we celebrate home-grown entrepreneurs who
have turned their passion into a thriving business

WORDS BY EMMA PRITCHARD • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRISTIAN BARNETT

SEW • COOK • WRITE • DRAW • MAKE • GROW

Kitchen Table Talent



A CARMARTHENSHIRE BUSINESS

"It's hard not to be drawn to this part of Wales [Mike says]. We've lived in Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire in the past but always felt the need to settle in Carmarthenshire.

It's where Nia grew up (I was brought up in Hampshire) and there's something special about the countryside here. We're close to the Brecon Beacons - and far enough from the tourist trail - and near to the coast to go surfing.

We always have a cuckoo come spring, and swallows regularly try to fly into our workshop. Having nature on our doorstep is what makes our setting so special."





In the wooded valley of the River Tywi in Carmarthenshire, not far from a snaking single-track lane, there's an unusual sound on the autumn breeze. It vies with the song of a skylark and the distant bark of an excitable dog. The distinctive whirr of a sewing machine is an indication that Nia Wood and Mike Watt – creators of Rural Kind, for which they create beautiful leather accessories and bags – are hard at work inside a converted stable block on Nia's parents' former smallholding. Here, in the Welsh hills, they proudly celebrate British craft and tradition with every seam, stitch and buckle.

"We wanted to take a step back from a world of mass production, outsourcing and disposable living, and create a small business that supported our simple, rural and sustainable ideals," says Mike, pausing to reposition a piece of fabric under the moving foot of the heavy-duty sewing machine. It's a far cry from his previous line of work – he trained as an architect before setting up his own solo practice. Now his days are spent in a workshop that has gallery windows overlooking hedgerows currently heavy with blackberries. "I love watching the changing seasons. Working for myself gives me the time to really appreciate it," he says.

His partner – both personally and in business – stands at a large square work table, a piece of slate-coloured canvas spread out in front of her. Nia is a qualified archaeologist and also ran her own baking business for five years, but, like Mike, had never felt satisfied with her career path. "We both knew that we wanted to work together," she says. "It was just a question of doing what?" The idea to make bags originally came from their own practical need – we like hiking and wanted a backpack we could take with

us, then we were looking for something to store our lunch in, and to protect our journals. When I caught Mike doodling designs in front of the fire one evening, we decided to make up a prototype from offcuts we could source easily and the business evolved from there."

That, in essence, is Rural Kind: honest and simple. Six months of making and modifying designs in the evenings and at weekends led to their first product: the waxed canvas utility tote, a versatile hold-all that now comes in their signature three colours: slate, teal and tobacco. "We source the canvas from Dundee, the leather from Devon and the brass fittings from the West Midlands. It's important to us to support British businesses," Mike says. "We also use a bonded nylon thread that can be burnt at the ends to secure each seam (in addition to back-stitching) and prevent fraying. When you use high-quality materials, every detail matters. We make our bags to last."

Mike pulls out a roll of light brown leather from beneath the worktop and smooths it flat. "Each hide is unique and sourced from West Country cattle and is tanned using oak bark. We like that you can see the animal's natural markings – they tell a story." He begins to slice the leather into thin strips using a special wooden cutter. These will make the straps of their totes and harvesting bags. The shorter handles come from the thicker and stronger 'butt' part found at the rear of the cow. "Mike does all the leather work," Nia says, taking a pew at another of their three industrial sewing machines, sourced second-hand from Freecycle and ebay. "It takes a lot of strength to cut – plus it's so expensive, I'm terrified I'll mess it up!"

Fortunately, mistakes are something Rural Kind haven't experienced many of. A combination of their gradual organic growth and preference for 'slow working' has meant that any design issues have been dealt with before causing problems. When they launched in 2014, it was on a shoestring budget – Mike was freelance, Nia was working part-time for the National Trust, and the pair were living with her parents to save up a deposit for a house. "We didn't want to take out a loan, so we had to rely on the savings we had," Nia reveals. "We didn't know how

OPPOSITE AND THIS PAGE
Nia and Mike's business idea developed organically from their love of walking and a need for a practical but stylish backpack

(top right). They create their durable and functional products in a considered way, sourcing the materials from British businesses



many orders we'd get – if any – so we had to start small. That's where working with independent suppliers really helped; they let us order in minimal quantities, which meant we could establish ourselves without the financial risk." Fortunately Rural Kind received orders from their website straightaway and they've continued to grow ever since; they now make more than 20 bags and accessories per month. "We've learnt that summer is a quieter time – winter and the run-up to Christmas is our busiest period," Nia says.

Two rhythmic bangs of a hand-operated press and Mike has stamped the first leather strip with the Rural Kind logo. "As an unknown brand, we wanted it to be as simple and obvious as possible," he says. He returns the stamp to a box containing the logo markers for each of the three Rural Kind collaborations. Like many aspects of the business, the origins of these stem from online. "Instagram has been an incredible springboard for us," Mike reveals. "We haven't done any formal publicity – all our customers have discovered us through social media and word of mouth. We were approached by Charlott Fletcher, The Future Kept and Another Escape to make bespoke products after they saw our Instagram feed."

As Mike begins to attach the strap to his finished bag – first 'hole-punching' the thick material, then fixing the pieces together with copper rivets and washers – Nia crosses the cobbled courtyard to the main house. Within minutes, black Scottie dogs Bo and Bramble have bounded into the studio. "Sometimes they join us here, but they're more comfortable on a sofa by a fire," Nia laughs. Mike places his tote on a shelf, ready to be posted; after four hours of work it is complete. "Our smaller items – wallets and key carriers – take up to two hours, but most items are closer to five. Using traditional techniques and hand-finishing can be laborious – but satisfyingly so." With the day's work done and the dogs eager for their walk, Mike picks up his favourite Rural Kind backpack and he and Nia head out into the evening sunshine. 🐾

📌 *For more information about Rural Kind and the products, visit ruralkind.co.uk.*

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT...



That doing your own publicity is a big challenge. We're not naturally outspoken, so spreading the word about our business doesn't necessarily come easily to us. Marketing remains a continual learning process – bit by bit we're carving out our own little corner on social media and the internet.

Collaboration can be a great triumph.


Working with other creatives who we admire is always fulfilling, and we love being able to share our design ideas and ethos with like-minded British businesses.

How important it is to stick with what you set out to do. We began Rural Kind with a clear idea of our values and what we wanted to do – but it's so easy to lose focus.

Being persistent and remaining constant to our idea has been invaluable.

The leather and waxed cotton canvas (below right) are chosen for their strength and durability – the couple want their customers to enjoy walks in the countryside as much as they do





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WHEN: 2 October 2017 ● TIME: 9.30am-4.30pm

PRICE: £125, including all sessions, a delicious lunch, refreshments, a business information folder and a CL goody bag

Find the Confidence

If a fear of failure is getting in the way of your business aspirations, we invite you to spend the afternoon in our Soho venue and hear from life-coach and author of *Start Your Dream Business* Carole Ann Rice. This will be followed by a panel chat with established entrepreneurs who are happy to share their stories and answer your questions. Afterwards, enjoy getting to know the *Country Living* editorial team and network with other budding business owners over a glass of fizz and canapés.

WHEN: 12 October 2017 ● TIME: 2.30pm-6.30pm

PRICE: £45, including two inspirational talks, plus a glass of sparkling wine and canapé reception, and a CL goody bag

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A rustic kitchen interior featuring wooden beams, shelves, and a dining table. The shelves are filled with various kitchen items like mugs, bowls, and jars. The dining table is set with a large wooden bowl, a vase of pink flowers, and several smaller bowls containing fruit. The overall style is warm and traditional.

HEART *of the home*

Whether your style is cool and contemporary
or traditional and timeless, create your dream
kitchen with our inspiring ideas

WORDS BY BEN KENDRICK

CLASSIC AND UNIQUE

The staple of this kitchen is solid-wood cabinetry and timeless design. Invest in a quality kitchen that will last, and the colour and finish can be changed at a later date, if desired, by repainting. Add character by teaming fitted cabinets with a few freestanding items to give the room individual style and prevent it looking “all of a piece”. These could be a table and chairs, a plate rack or a dresser.

1 A Shaker aesthetic or pared-back Georgian look gives an ordered simplicity, while limiting the amount of kitchenalia on display creates a serene and practical space.

2 When picking cabinet-door designs, choose something simple. Fielded cabinet-door panels, reminiscent of a Shaker style, are perfect; tongue-and-groove doors also give a classic look. For door furniture, choose solid wood knobs, perhaps painted, brass or silver metal handles or cup drawer pulls.

3 Cool, classic colours work best for this style. Cabinets painted in stone, white, blue or off-white have a perennial appeal that will never date. A ceramic sink completes the look. The double versions create a second sink, which is useful for draining. A mix of open shelving and woven baskets allows you to store and display rustic pieces to stylish effect.

For floors, traditional materials work best. Slate, stone, terracotta, wood or brick are all good choices. ➔





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4 A ceramic farmhouse sink provides a more modern, shallower option than a deep Belfast design, while maintaining a traditional look. As a result, it takes less water to fill and doesn't involve as much bending when washing up.

5 Range cookers give visual appeal and a homely warmth to a classic kitchen. Choose from enamelled Agas and Rayburns, which have a reassuring solidity, or a modern version in stainless steel or brushed metal.

ENDURING STYLE

- Choose a worktop made from natural materials. Solid wood, wood-block, marble and slate work well. Or try a composite, stone-like surface such as Silestone or Corian, which are robust and require less maintenance
- An island unit is a great space for preparation and makes the kitchen a more social space. It doesn't have to be fitted – a freestanding table also works well
- An existing recess or redundant fireplace are ideal places to site a range cooker or create the illusion of these by building a surround
- A combination of cupboards will give more character than similarly styled units. Mix antique or vintage and freestanding with new designs



5

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MODERN COUNTRY

Contemporary kitchens work exceptionally well as open-plan living spaces where the style of decoration can be successfully carried throughout the room and into dining and living areas. Modern furniture and contemporary lighting, especially industrial designs, make an immediate statement.

1 Unusual materials are key to this style. Reclaimed wood can be used to clad walls and cabinet fronts, or there's the option to experiment with surfaces more commonly used outdoors, such as corrugated iron, as a striking backdrop on a wall. It is often the contrast of crisp modern pieces, stainless-steel appliances or smart furniture against rougher, more organic, elements that heightens this effect. For floors, consider putting down reclaimed stone, brick or cast concrete, all of which have lots of texture and variation for added interest.

2 Limiting the palette of colours offers a more contemporary, pared-back

feel. Work with mainly neutral shades or use some bold splashes on an otherwise pale background – perhaps a strongly coloured freestanding fridge, signature lighting or a striking rug. A monochrome palette will always feel crisp and current.

3 Strong linear shapes hold the eye – think of the silhouettes of metal chairs, cage lighting or filament bulbs. Fabrics in graphic geometrics or simple stripes can also strike a modern note. Dark colours add drama, whether on floors or cabinetry. Try deep teal, charcoal or petrol blue on units – it can make them seem to recede and become less dominant in a room.



CONTEMPORARY STYLE

- Stripping back a room to reveal bare plaster, beams or exposed brickwork makes a functional space more visually appealing
- Eschew curtains in favour of simpler blinds or shutters or leave well-proportioned windows unadorned
- Mix reclaimed shop fittings with open shelving or salvaged industrial cabinets with conventional fitted units. These robust pieces serve as ideal storage for kitchen tools and implements as well as china and glass





DECORATIVE AND DETAILED

Creating this style of country kitchen – where the features play as much a part as the harder-working functional elements – needs to be carefully thought out. Ideally, the space should be appealing and feel warm and welcoming but remain practical, and the essence of a decorated kitchen can fight with such an ethos. However, there are many ways to balance this.

1 If you use wallpaper, think about where it is placed. It could be restricted to above dado or even picture-rail height so that it won't get spoiled by grease and steam. Alternatively, use toughened glass to protect it, creating a waterproof splashback, or put it on another wall (easier in an open-plan room), away from the cooker and sink.

2 Adding accessories and decorative items is a great way to introduce character and interest to the room. Display a favourite collection on a shelf or dresser. These could be pieces of studio pottery, kitchenalia or functional items – such as storage jars that are attractive enough to remain on show. Remember to consider where they will be positioned, especially if they

are near the work area.

Items located near to or above the cooker will need to be regularly taken down and cleaned. Glazed or wire-fronted cupboards are a good way to see favourite pieces without having to clean them so often.

3 Soft furnishings are an essential part of a decorative kitchen – they can add warmth and help to soften echoey acoustics. Run fabric over cupboard-fronts to create inexpensive cabinets or introduce colour in cushions on chairs and benches. Ensure blinds or café curtains are dry-cleanable or machine washable – some fabric companies have collections that are washable – or use utility or dress-weight materials, pre-washed so they don't shrink once made up ➔





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4 An easy way to introduce colour is to use paint on walls, cabinets and units – a low-level soft sheen emulsion that is wipeable is a good choice. For furniture, an eggshell paint that can be cleaned is essential. Dark cabinets are currently fashionable but stoney shades or blues and greens are relaxing in a kitchen; reds and yellows

also work well and can be energising.

5 Tiles are the perfect way to introduce both colour and design in a durable, low-maintenance form. Floor tiles or a splashback on walls and above worktops are ideal. Simple geometrics and encaustic tiles that introduce lively pattern are popular at the moment.



5

ORIGINAL STYLE

- Vinyl tiles make practical, warm and softer flooring, so things are less likely to break when dropped. A striking chequerboard works well
- A chalkboard for shopping lists and memos can become an eye-catching and ever-changing piece of artwork
- Display a collection of vintage kitchenware or utensils on shelves or from overhead rails, like a *batterie de cuisine*
- Blinds are a good way to introduce softness and decoration and often they don't need to be functional, so a pretty roll-up, or Swedish blind, is an ideal choice ➔



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B BERT AND MAY (bertandmay.com)

Subtle, streamlined, modern-rustic kitchens in timber with brass fittings, sinks, taps etc. Also geometric new and old Spanish encaustic tiles.

BOFFI (boffi.com) Sleek contemporary kitchen designs from Italy.

BRITISH STANDARD (britishstandard.co.uk)

Stylish, classic designs from Suffolk, which suit both contemporary and classic kitchens. Supplies up to collection but doesn't design or fit.

D DEVOL (devolkitchens.com)

Simple units that could work for all styles, some in collaboration with designer Sebastian Cox. Range of tiles, chopping boards and accessories.

F FIRED EARTH (firedearth.com)

Wide range of tiles for floors and walls, freestanding kitchen furniture and shelving in painted options using its own high-quality paints. Design service available.

H HARVEY JONES (harveyjones.com)

Mid-priced kitchens in a small range of cabinet styles.

HOLLOWAYS OF LUDLOW (hollowaysofludlow.com)

Good selection of sinks, taps and lighting in current and classic styles.

HOWDENS (howdens.com)

Wide range of kitchens, appliances and flooring. Can only be purchased through a builder or kitchen fitter.

I IKEA (ikea.com)

Unbeatably priced kitchens that work well in small spaces. Great range of storage options and freestanding kitchen. Instore planner.

J JOHN LEWIS (johnlewis.com)

Appliances, electricals and kitchens in ten styles. Instore planning service. Butcher's blocks, stools, plate racks and tables and chairs.

JOHN LEWIS OF HUNGERFORD (john-lewis.co.uk)

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N NAKED KITCHENS (nakedkitchens.com)

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CL PROMOTION

Seasonal stars

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£14,000; Carter
extending
table, £1,590;
Carter bench,
£450; Carter
shelves, from
£580; Longton
large jug, £14;
Lucien linen
napkins, £32/
set of six

The new collection from Neptune combines rich colours with plaids and tactile velvets to capture the essence of the great British library

For those who are yet to discover Neptune, theirs is a world of beautifully made furniture, textiles and accessories for the home and garden. Design-wise, the company is perhaps best known for its kitchens with its heirloom-worthy dressers not far behind. Its trademark look is British – refined, sturdy and with an almost obsessive attention to detail – plus the brand is certainly most respected for its commitment to craft and quality. Put simply, Neptune makes things it is proud of, and wants you to be proud of them, too.

All of that (and more) is true of the autumn/winter 2017 collection, which launches in early September. Highlights include a new corner concept for its contemporary Shoreditch seating range that follows Neptune's meticulous approach to upholstery design (the solid timber frame beneath the textile is a piece of furniture in its own right), and seemingly simple accessories such as the Thaxted stainless-steel cutlery where every aspect is considered, be it the weight in your palm, the particular length of each fork prong or the harder alloy mix in the knives.

There is always a story that inspires and contextualises Neptune, and the design team have called this range The Collector's Edition. Showcasing new pieces alongside those from seasons gone by, this season Neptune bottles the essence of the great British library, exploring ways in which you can achieve an element of historic refinement and warmth in every aspect of your home, from a ceiling-to-floor display of books in a living room to pairings of teal and brass that lend a nod to wood-panelled rooms.

Here, Neptune's creative director, Emma Sims-Hilditch, reveals her favourite pieces from the new collection.



ABOVE Rupert stool upholstered in Isla Fox, £345; Fleming small mirror, £125; Florence cushion in Lorne Plaid, £67 **BELOW LEFT** Keswick square side table, £415 **BELOW** Lorne fabric, £72/m

LORNE

"Last year, we started to introduce more printed fabrics. We have had various stripes (Agatha and Jack), an ikat (Gabriela) and a floral (Emma) but Lorne is our first plaid. Spun from pure wool and beautifully classic, it's a traditional design, but this season we are mixing it with beautifully tactile velvets in deep teal or fox and super-soft, dappled wools."

KESWICK

"This table collection is so elegant, and a wonderful example of how less is more. There are five in the range – two sizes of console, a tall and slim side table, and two coffee tables – and each one is incredibly versatile. The clean, fine lines and simplicity mean Keswick works well in a symmetrical layout, so two cube coffee tables look effective when used next to each other in a living room. They also work as low side tables. Equally, the side table can act as a scaled-down console."





LEFT Olivia empress sofa upholstered in Isla Kingfisher, £2,780; Keswick rectangular side table, £415; Herdwick sheepskin, £135; walls painted in Teal matte emulsion, £37/2.5L
ABOVE Carter desk, £1,210; Mowbray dining chair upholstered in Angus Flint, from £320; Carter bookcase, £1,320; Brompton brass desk lamp, £140; City plans print, £168

TEAL

"Our seasonal shade for autumn/winter 2017 is teal. Navy and dark grey are still being heralded as the more 'on-trend' options to black but teal offers a new alternative. We'll be using it on quite a large scale, from ceilings to walls and skirting boards, to highlight its gorgeous depths. It will translate to even the smallest rooms – it's a common misconception that only large and light rooms can take dark colours. In fact, by following nature's cue, you'll see that rooms with little natural light thrive on the darkness, and teal will simply make them feel bolder. It's a shade that manages to be both cool and cosy, so it works all year round. I am also looking forward to seeing it being used on kitchen cabinetry. We've seen lots of grey-blue kitchens, and even bottle green, but teal is still relatively unexplored."

OLIVIA

"This may be one of our longstanding upholstery designs, but there are two important reasons why this sofa is one of my favourite pieces this season. Firstly, it's a new size. It has three generously sized seat cushions, so someone who's six foot tall can easily lie down without touching the armrests. If you have the space for a larger sofa, it's such a worthwhile investment. Secondly, there's the colour – it looks fabulous in our Isla Teal velvet with our darker wood finish on the turned oak legs. When you sit and lean back on Olivia, it's then that you can appreciate the feather-filled back cushion that we've hidden beneath the upholstery."

Discover the full collection online, including the designs shown here, and find your nearest Neptune store at neptune.com.

CARTER

"We first introduced Carter in last year's autumn/winter collection, and now include a few new designs, including this pared-down desk. You will see the same slim steel frame that's powder coated, then baked, and solid oak surface that we've taken through a seven-step finishing process (we do this to achieve a touch of rusticity without it needing to be old, weathered timber). Carter is all about disciplined, minimal design, so we've made any storage elements discreet, such as two drawers and a slot beneath the shelf, so you can keep the tabletop uncluttered."

N
 NEPTUNE



CIDER *house* RULES

Among the apple orchards
of Herefordshire, craft cider is
being produced in a restored
17th-century mill, driven
by pony power and a passion
for tradition

WORDS BY KITTY CORRIGAN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW MONTGOMERY



PREVIOUS PAGE Pye with Alan McCardle
THIS PICTURE John Lloyd, co-owner of the gypsy cob, urges him on as he pulls the stone wheel



Pye the piebald pony has a tummy ache. He may have eaten too much hay, gorged himself on the pile of glistening apples by the stable door, or have performance anxiety. For today this ten-year-old gypsy cob, who spends most of his time grazing on the Black Mountains, will be taking a central role in the cider-making on Hilary and Matthew Engel's land.

Once a year in October, Pye is transported from his home, a few miles over the border in Wales, to work in a restored 17th-century cider mill at Fair Oak Farm in Bacton, Herefordshire. Here, he is yoked to wooden shafts attached to a large stone wheel, and as he plods round and round, his muscular power easily crushes the fruit tipped into the trough by the bucketload.

"We didn't have any farming experience when we moved here 20 years ago," Hilary says, "so we leased the 75 acres of land to a tenant farmer while we concentrated on restoring the house and outbuildings. Through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, we also learned about coppicing and replanting hedges, and created a pond, which now attracts frogs, newts and bats."

It was in 2011 that Chris Robinson, a carpenter renting the former dairy as a workshop, suggested it might be possible to get the cider mill and press working again. There are as many as 2,000 derelict mills in Herefordshire, dating to the era when every farmer made cider, which formed part-payment for the workers. With the bit between his teeth, Chris scoured salvage yards to find a replacement screw for the press, repaired broken joints and re-created missing wooden parts. He enlisted the help of Alan McCardle, a care worker he had met through a folk-singing group in nearby

Longtown called Two Tanners and a Fiver. "I was the restorer's assistant," Alan says. "Chris was the brain and I the brawn."

Meanwhile, Hilary researched the history of cider-making in Herefordshire: "I tracked down an 80-year-old man, Eric Lewis, still living in the area, who was able to describe the original process. I read books, studied old photographs and visited every mill I could find." Their hard work bore fruit and now, in a bartering system reminiscent of 17th-century practice, landowners donate apples in return for Alan maintaining their trees, putting in sheep from time to time to keep the grass down, and organising the harvest from July. Some apples are picked by hand, others with a shaker attached to a tractor and a sweeper for collection.

Once the fruit has been gathered from across the Golden Valley, it is washed outside the pressing shed in a three-metre-long tin trough resting on timber trestles, and any mouldy specimens are discarded on the compost heap – the remainder is graded for producing dry, sweet or sparkling cider. The varieties bear names more redolent of rural tradition than any foreign imports you'll find in supermarkets: Foxwhelp, Kingston Black, Bulmer's Norman and Dabinett are all grown within a ten-mile radius.

Today, during the pressing, Alan, who has experience of home brewing, is very much in evidence as general overseer. Dressed in a rubber cider-maker's apron to protect his clothes from tannin, and a pork pie hat with a guitar thumb pick tucked into the ribbon band, as if he might at any moment launch into a wassailing song, he stands by the wooden press. As each batch of apples is pulped, he layers the aromatic mixture inside a square-metre-sized hessian envelope, called a hair, as it was originally woven from horse hair. It's not long before there are nine



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RURAL BUSINESS

or ten hairs in a block, called a cheese, within a wooden form. Alan then cranks down the heavy wooden beam that presses the hairs, releasing the juice into a bucket below. It is then siphoned into barrels to begin the fermentation process.

"From October until Easter, the cider develops and the sediment will fall to the bottom," Alan explains. "Then we pump the partly fermented juice into clean barrels. By the end of August, most of the finished cider has been bottled, ahead of the new harvest." The end product, the alcohol content of which is approximately 6.5% ABV (about half that of wine), is then sold as Fair Oak Cider at markets, shows and local shops, bearing Pye's proud profile on the label.

In 2011, the first year of cider-making, it took three strong men to push the stone round the trough in the mill, with frequent rests: time-consuming, heavy labour. When, three years later, after contacting horse dealers and rescue centres without success, Hilary heard about Pye, she was eager to see how he would fare. "He had been trained to drive a trap, so the signs were good," she says. "Strong and stocky, with legs like a Shire horse, he was also the required height – 12 hands – to fit into the low, dark space." At his audition, he donned the collar and yoke like a natural and, with reassuring words from his owner, performed



The apples bear names redolent of rural tradition such as Foxwhelp and Dabinett

ABOVE RIGHT Amos picks out some apples to taste **BELOW AND RIGHT** Hessian envelopes of crushed apples; Chris Robinson, the carpenter whose idea it was to restore the mill, enjoys the result of his efforts



impeccably. This year is his fourth appearance and, as his reputation has spread, he always attracts a small crowd.

Today, union rules apply and Pye is given regular breaks for hay, water and grooming – he even has his own mane and tail de-tangler, lovingly applied by his owner, Wendy Lloyd, who seems to have horse-whispering powers. "If he doesn't want to do the work, he won't budge," she says, remarking that his ears pointing forward means he is alert and engaged. He doesn't wear shoes on his hooves because he lives on the grassy slopes of the Welsh mountain Twmpa (Lord Hereford's Knob, in English), but for this annual event, sand is sprinkled on the mill's stone floor to soften the surface, which bears the marks of numerous draught animals before him.

As Pye takes a break, the crowd standing outside in the crisp autumn air gratefully consume glasses of last year's Fair Oak Cider. The sons of Hilary's niece – Jonah, ten, Amos, seven, and Gabriel, three – race around the farmyard and into the mill, staring in wonderment at what's taking place inside. To the adults, it's barely less remarkable – a scene that would have been commonplace to their great-great-grandparents, one that recalls the rich history of the area while celebrating the magnificent produce grown within it. 🇬🇧

i Fair Oak Farm, Bacton, Herefordshire (01981 510250; fairoakcider.co.uk). The Engels will hold two cider-making events this year on 21 and 22 October. Donations go to the Laurie Engel Fund for Teenage Cancer Trust, in memory of their son, Laurie, who died of cancer aged 13. There are also two holiday cottages on the farm available to rent. Hilary is the author of *Golden Valley Voices*, which is available direct from her.

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WITCH MARKINGS

A FEW YEARS BACK, I WAS CLEANING

our old stone threshing barn in preparation for renting it out to a sculptor who wanted the space as a studio. It has soaring ceilings and pale, lime-plastered walls, but it had been unused for years – the only occupiers the swallows that return every summer without fail.

Inside, it was filthy and, shamed into a thorough clear-out, I began brushing the plaster to remove decades of cobwebs and farmyard grime. Broom in one hand and gripping the ladder with the other, I reached up to the highest parts of the walls, only to discover that, as the dust fell away, a pattern appeared.

It was a circle, the size of a dinner plate, inside which someone had delicately and accurately scribed a daisy. To its left, a few metres away, another circle appeared, and another, until I'd uncovered a frieze of six beautifully etched designs. 'How lovely,' I thought, 'that someone went to the trouble of decorating a barn with such pretty patterns.' And left it at that.

That was until last October, when a picture of something that looked exactly like my 'daisy wheels' appeared in the newspaper, with the headline: 'Public Asked to Record Witch-Markings on Halloween'. It turned out that my patterns were, in fact, a type of ancient graffiti known as 'hexfoils'. These, and other historic scratchings, are found in barns, churches and other rural buildings, carved into walls and wood

Scratched
into beams
and next to
fireplaces, these
surprisingly
common
symbols open
a door into the
history of rural
Britain

WORDS BY
SALLY COULTHARD



TOP AND ABOVE Witches' marks at Knole in Kent were found on joists beneath the floorboards

to ward off evil spirits and bring good fortune. What's more, they're old. Really old. Possibly medieval and part of a story that stretches back into a darkly lit corner of British folklore.

As in all great detective stories, archaeologists are now trying to uncover the 'who', 'why' and 'where' of the strange scribbles. For centuries, these carvings lay largely unnoticed – often too faint to be seen by candlelight or mistaken for mason's marks – until in 1967 a Cambridge academic, Violet Pritchard, published a paper about the strange carvings she'd noticed in nearby rural churches.

Although still a niche area of research, interest in ancient graffiti has grown, thanks in large part to archaeologist Matthew Champion, whose recent book *Medieval Graffiti* revealed that, far from being destructive scribbles, it has value and purpose.

In today's society, we view graffiti as mindless defacing but, according to Matthew, ancient inscriptions are, in fact, a window into the past: "These early graffiti inscriptions had both meaning and function. A far cry from the random doodling of an alienated generation, they were the prayers, memorials, hopes and fears of the medieval parish."

They come from a time when a belief in witches and superstition was part of everyday life. People constantly sought protection from evil spirits, witches or their animal



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Marks in a 400-year-old barn in Hertfordshire; Solomon's Knot at St John's Church in Duxford; 'Daisy

wheels' in a Saxon tithe barn in Bradford-on-Avon; marks around a fireplace in a 15th-century inn; hexfoil on a barn door in Suffolk



familiars. "The world was full of dangers, both physical and spiritual," Matthew explains. "These markings were made simply as a way to make it a safer, less hostile place; the front line in the defence of the soul."

Men and women would scratch specific symbols as an act of devotion or to evoke good luck – the most common is the daisy wheel, or hexfoil, a pattern with endless lines that were supposed to confuse and entrap evil spirits. Other common marks that appear are pentangles (five-pointed stars) and the letters VV or AM, often intertwined, which refer to the Virgin Mary. Other more pictorial marks have been uncovered, from sailing ships to monstrous demons, musical notes to windmills, all representing voices from the past hoping for the safe return of a ship, a plentiful crop or protection in the afterlife.

Previous research had focused on graffiti found in churches, where it was more likely to survive untouched by renovations or demolition. But as work continues and more markings are uncovered, it seems they are absolutely, gloriously, everywhere. Chapels, cottages, caves, agricultural buildings – from the lowliest cattle shed to the houses of the great and the good – symbols have been discovered in locations as diverse as the Tower of London, Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon and Somerset's Wookey Hole.

They also cover a huge period in British history, appearing to continue well into the 18th century. Dating ancient graffiti can be tricky, however, as Matthew Champion explains: "In many cases you simply can't be too precise." Just because a mark is carved into medieval stone doesn't make it medieval. "In

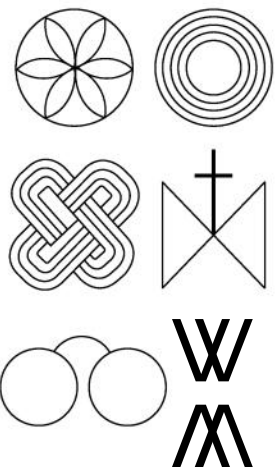
"The best places to look are where evil forces might enter a building"

some cases," he continues, "there appears to be a tradition of repeatedly marking places and objects over time," as if subsequent generations are reinforcing the symbol's protection. "The oldest securely dated marks are the mid-13th-century examples on door frames at Donington le Heath Manor House in Leicestershire."

So, if you want to look for some yourself, where to start? There are a few red herrings to watch out for – mason's marks, carpenter's notches and even 20th-century children's doodles have all been mistaken for witches' marks. Matthew has this advice: "The best places are entrances and void spaces within a building – so around doors and fireplaces – or even on the roof timbers. Generally places where it was thought that evil forces might enter a building."

Windows, cellar doors, hatches and chimney breasts are also good places to look. So if you do find something, check out the box (right) and see how yours compares. If you think you have seen a witch mark, email it to Matthew at info@medieval-graffiti.co.uk and he will take a look. "It's exciting to think," he concludes, "that there are undoubtedly others still out there awaiting discovery." 🏠

COMMON WITCHES' MARKINGS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Hexfoil, concentric circles, butterfly cross, VV and AM markings, spectacles and pelta (also known as Solomon's knot)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DARREN COOK/BBC NEWS; HISTORICENGLAND.ORG.UK; PA IMAGES

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This month OTTERS



LEFT The Eurasian otter has an acute sense of sight, smell and hearing. Having eyes placed high on the head means it can see when the rest of the body is below water



ABOVE Two cubs play-fight – they stay with their mother for just over a year
RIGHT Its sensitive whiskers help to detect prey



SLEEK AND GLISTENING, THE OTTER COILED ON THE BANK, before slipping away, re-entering the water 'by melting' as Ted Hughes once wrote. I'd hoped to catch a glimpse of our most elusive mammal by taking a canoe out onto the Norfolk Broads at 4am. After two freezing dawns, I returned home having caught nothing more than a cold. A few weeks later, one bright Sunday afternoon, I hired a small boat to chug noisily through a busy, suburban lake and there, five metres ahead, frolicked a magnificent, supposedly nocturnal, otter.

Otters are not obliging animals, and we love them all the more for it, but we would still marvel at their aquatic grace even if they were a quotidian part of our environment. When I took my children to the zoo, we stood agape by the otters for as long as we admired the giraffes. The otter is the only British mammal that can hold its own in a collection of the world's most charismatic animals. Forty years ago, it was poignant to behold them in a zoo because this was a creature that had virtually vanished from our countryside. In 1978, belatedly, they were protected in law after hunting, habitat-loss and the disastrous build-up of heavy metals and other toxic pesticides in waterways caused them to teeter on the brink of extinction. Now, unexpectedly, otters are thriving once again, having returned to every English county by 2011. "Like a spirit level, its reappearance indicates that we are finding our balance with the wild," writes Miriam Darlington in *Otter Country*.

It is no wonder that the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) has inspired some wonderful writing, from Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter* to Gavin Maxwell's *Ring of Bright Water*. Our only native species powers through the water at a metre per second in pursuit of eels and other fish. It is top of its food chain, with no natural predators, and yet its existence is a triumph against the odds. Living in chilly water, an otter's metabolic motor is running around four and a half times the speed of a dog's. In *Being A Beast*, the writer Charles Foster attempted to live like one, calculating he'd need to eat 88 Big Macs each day to keep pace. "These jangling, snarling, roaming, twitching bundles of ADHD," as he put it, spend 18 hours asleep and six hours engaged in "frenetic killing". Foster realised it was impossible to mimic their way of life. Zoologists find it so difficult to follow them in the wild that Britain's leading researchers can only get up close when they are dead.

Cardiff University's Otter Project has been collecting carcasses and conducting post-mortems since 1992. "Many people who have seen *CSI* would assume that it's to establish the cause of death but that's not our main function," explains principal investigator Dr Elizabeth Chadwick. In most cases, cause of death is obvious – sadly many are found on the edge of busy roads. But Chadwick and her team use the bodies to discover many more insights into behaviour, lifestyle, population and the health of our waterways. The project began by collecting about a dozen carcasses a year; it is now sent 250, just one sign of the otter's resurgence. "We're

The otter is the only British mammal
that can hold its own in a collection of the
world's most charismatic animals





WHERE TO GO OTTER SPOTTING

● **Bosherston Lakes in Pembrokeshire** is one of the most reliable places for seeing these mammals. Even I've seen one swimming among the lily pads here. They are mostly nocturnal, so it's best to look for them at dawn and dusk (nationaltrust.org.uk/stackpole/trails/bosherston-lily-ponds-freshwater-magic-walk).

● **Earsham Wetland Centre on the banks of the River Waveney, on the Suffolk-Norfolk border**, offers free entry and a riverside walk where they are regularly spotted. It is the former otter-breeding centre for The Otter Trust (earshamwetlandcentre.com).

● **Volunteers can help monitor otter populations for wildlife charities.** Shropshire Wildlife Trust's Otter Project uses camera traps to search for otters on the River Severn (shropshirewildlife.org.uk/what-we-do/wild-water/otter-project), and the Canal & River Trust is seeking volunteers to help survey otters on the waterways of Birmingham. Contact Paul Wilkinson at enquiries.westmidlands@canalrivertrust.org.uk.

● **Perhaps the most foolproof location for otters is the Isle of Mull.** Other sea lochs along Scotland's west coast are similarly rich in otters, which can be seen foraging for food on the water's edge. But don't mistakenly call these beasts 'sea otters' – they are still our native otter, and not the different North American sea otter (visitscotland.com/destinations-maps/isle-mull).

A young otter surfaces with a shore crab in the Shetlands – they are naturally exceptional catchers of fish and seafood

seeing them coming from areas where they haven't been established before," Chadwick says – particularly in south-east England.

Otters are sentinels of river health, and they bring good news. Levels of heavy metals and the other chemicals banned in the 1970s concentrate in the bodies of beasts at the top of the food chain but their appearance is decreasing in otters. "Contaminants have fallen but should they be there at all?" Chadwick asks. The Otter Project team has recently detected microbeads in the animals. Chadwick says these are "microscopic strands" and it isn't believed they are causing direct harm, but they are analysing the data. Another trend revealed is the decline in what was once one of their diet staples: the eel. With fewer salmon and trout, too, otters are forced to eat less nourishing food such as crayfish, toads and frogs. In some areas, shortages may be contributing to otters stealing chickens and, most controversially, raiding recreational fishing lakes.

Ironically, it was anglers who first identified otters' decline but, with numbers recovering to more than 10,000 in the UK, they have called for them to be culled. Saying the otter has no natural predator and must be controlled by humans misunderstands their ecology, argue scientists. The otter cannot wipe out fish populations; rather, its numbers are controlled by its prey; fewer fish, and otters will simply starve. In fact, says Chadwick, otters on a river are a sign of healthy ecosystem, and an abundance of fish. "You won't get otter populations continuing to go up and up. They are naturally regulating," she argues. "Fish populations will learn to adapt, and fish that have grown up in an area where there are no otters will behave differently to those where they are around." Her point is vividly illustrated by a pike fisherman I meet on the Norfolk Broads. When otters first returned to his local river five years ago, he was often pulling up pike displaying otter-inflicted injuries. Now he rarely finds injured pike. Instead, he observes the fish behaving more cautiously, lurking on the riverbed to avoid them.

We, too, are having to adapt to a world where otters are commonplace, although they remain illusive, meaning that the sight of a V-shaped ripple in the water, followed by a beady eye and wet nose, will remain a rare pleasure for many years to come. 🦦

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Christmas is a mix of so many magical elements that I always feel a thrill of anticipation at the prospect of this favourite time of year.

And, for me, the perfect way to start my festive preparations is with a visit to the Country Living Christmas Fairs in London, Glasgow and Harrogate. Step inside and you'll find a wealth of beautiful original gifts and seasonal inspiration, with handcrafted presents, eye-catching decorations and a tempting array of the finest artisan-made food and drink, as well as special treats for yourself.

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Lucy Smith

Editor-in-chief, *Country Living* Magazine



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Allotted *pleasures*

Artist Lottie Day draws inspiration from her father's vegetable plot in north Norfolk to create distinctive hand-printed textiles

WORDS BY ALEX REECE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRISTIAN BARNETT



The colourful fruit, flowers and vegetables provide Lottie with artistic ideas – she then sketches them at the allotment

before turning them into vibrant screen-prints, which are stored in her studio on a drying rack



he autumnal sun glows amber in the sky above Hindolveston Allotments in north Norfolk, as artist Lottie Day helps her father, Adrian, gather ripe courgettes with their bell-like yellow flowers. “It’s full of beautiful things to draw that are rich in colour,” says Lottie of the small but prolific site of 15-20 plots, where the vibrant palette and characterful outlines of her father’s produce provide limitless inspiration for her screen-printed textile products. “It’s also a lovely place to hang out,” she continues, while doing some quick sketches, as Adrian tends his six vegetable beds, interspersed with fruit trees, berry bushes and sweetly scented verbenas. Close by, a few other plot-holders work in companionable silence – the only sounds are the mewing of buzzards overhead and the fluttering of bird scarers in the breeze.

Back at her brick and timber-clad studio – a converted garage at her parents’ home on the other side of Hindolveston, overlooking a cottage garden cultivated by her mother, Sue – Lottie will spend a few days perfecting her fine-line drawings of vegetables, or other rural finds, perhaps later returning to the allotment with her printing inks to match the colours more accurately in full daylight. These illustrations from life form the basis of the designs she screen-prints by hand onto an array of cotton and linen items from napkins to double deckchairs.

The idea for Lottie’s most popular range, the Allotment collection – featuring a purple turnip, a swede and a parsnip – was initially conceived as a Christmas gift for her father, reflecting his love of growing. “I just started printing a few tea towels and tried selling them in the run-up to Christmas,” recalls Lottie, who was running a gallery in Norwich at the





time. "Before I knew it, people were asking for more and more. I don't think Dad ever got his present!" Not that Adrian (who is a retired headteacher, as is Sue) minds: "I feel honoured," he says of having his vegetables immortalised in this way.

After growing up in Hindolveston, Lottie had her first taste of screen-printing while studying contemporary crafts at Falmouth University. Soon after graduation, and still living in Cornwall, she enjoyed success selling her own line of hand-printed deckchairs: "A beachwear company wanted to order thousands of them, but I just didn't have the capital to invest at the time, so I decided to leave Cornwall and make a bit of money in order to start again," she explains. Lottie returned home to Norfolk and found herself working in a pub for a year. By chance, an opportunity arose in 2010, via the pub landlord, of running her own gallery in the historic Assembly House in Norwich. As the enterprise, specialising in screen prints,

Every element of Lottie's work is done by hand, from digging the vegetables and mixing the dyes to get an exact match for her designs to the creation of

her products. She relishes the screen-printing process and embraces the unpredictability of a technique that means no two pieces are ever the same

linocuts and local craft, became more established, Lottie found she had more time to invest in her own print-making.

Following the enthusiastic response to her Allotment tea towels in 2014 ("People are passionate about their own gardens," Lottie says), she went on to sell at local craft fairs, where they went down equally well. Interaction with the public and fellow traders helped her define how she wanted her brand to take shape: "It's important to me that everything is handmade and, where possible, sourced from the UK."

The printing process is time-consuming and meticulous but it's a hands-on craft she loves. "I like how physical it is, and it's very satisfying to print the same image over and over again," she says, adding that she delights in any imperfections, as they show it's unique. "I like the misregistration, where you see a bit of white fabric underneath or some colour going over the outline – that print is never going to be the same as the one before or the one after."

Over time, her range has expanded to include other sights on the allotment, such as wild Norfolk hares, vivid dahlias and spring vegetables (among them baby carrots and radishes). Another line features delicate bird feathers and eggs – some drawn from life and others from an antique pocket field

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Lottie's beautifully simple designs work perfectly on lampshades, hand-sewn

canvas tote bags with leather handles and her bestselling boxes of napkins

guide owned by her grandmother. A lobster and lemon motif was inspired by regular visits to the nearby fishing town of Cromer with her partner Sam Leonard (whom she met at university). "I spend a lot of time in Cromer, going for sea swims when the sun's out," Lottie says.

Since starting, she has gone on to produce aprons, shopping bags, lampshades, mugs and double deckchairs, which she sews onto a hardwood frame. "They're for sitting on while you watch your vegetables grow," Lottie says. But her best-selling items are her cotton napkins, attractively presented in a recycled cardboard box of six, and tied up with string. Printed in batches of 40, each set takes two to three days to complete.

Winning the Editor's Choice award for her stand at the Country Living Fair in 2015 proved to be a real boost for Lottie: "As well as receiving the award, the feedback from visitors to the Fair was great," she says. "We had lots of interest from all sorts of people afterwards – it's helped no end." That same year, she produced an exclusive range for Anthropologie and also began selling with Not on the High Street. Through her online presence and via social media, her work has attracted customers from North America, Europe and Asia.

As the business took off, Lottie began to wind down her involvement in the gallery, focusing on her own brand full time. Sam also came on board, leaving his previous job in marketing in 2016, to work on her website, social media and photography. During her recent maternity leave following the arrival of their daughter, Raphaella, he acted as CEO. "It's quite a family affair," laughs Lottie, whose brother, Laurie, an architectural model maker, contributes with advice on branding. Her parents, meanwhile, help with childcare and have supported her interest in art and nature since childhood. "Adrian's always encouraged Lottie to look at the minutiae of things," Sue says.

During Lottie's weekly visits to the allotment, she might help out with the digging, planting, watering and harvesting, but her father is equally happy for her just to look around or do some sketching. As Adrian grows different and unusual vegetables every year (black and yellow French beans are a current favourite), there's no danger of her running out of ideas for future collections. Her Berry range, based on his gooseberries, raspberries and blackberries, is her most recent variation on the allotment theme. "I think the images are a good reminder of the pleasure we can all experience through gardening," Adrian says.

In future Lottie might experiment with producing fabric for soft furnishings, but the plan is to expand the enterprise in the organic way it has flourished so far. "I've never written a business plan or had a loan – we do one thing and that pays for the next, and I like that," she says. "There's no pressure." Such an approach allows her to concentrate on the things she loves doing most: drawing and printing. "All I ever really wanted to do was be in a little studio in the middle of the countryside making things," Lottie says – a dream that makes sense to us. 🇬🇧

📌 For more details, visit madebylotteday.com. CL readers can get a ten per cent discount until 30 September 2017 by entering the code 'Country Living' at the checkout. See Lottie at the Country Living Christmas Fair in London (stand MF18).



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and three orange large-headed roses, three sprays of red hypericum with birch, thlaspi green bell, salal and eucalyptus. 🇬🇧

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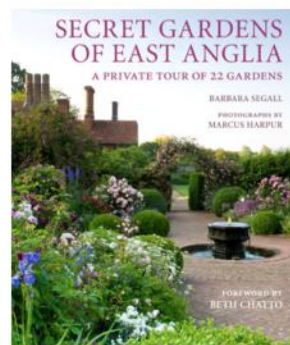
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A HANDSOME EVERGREEN

I've always found the easy-going glossy-leaved evergreen *Fatsia japonica* to be a useful shrub for introducing interest into a difficult corner and now there's another variety, 'Spider's Web' (left), to try. Its large, palmate leaves are heavily laced with white, so it would complement a white flower border or can be grown as a specimen plant in a large container, in loam-based compost. A great choice for partial shade, it costs £14.99 for a 1.5-litre pot from Crocus (01344 578111; crocus.co.uk).



A GOOD READ

East Anglia is still a relatively unsung part of the UK, so it's good to have Marcus Harpur and Barbara Segall's insider knowledge on the area in which they live. *Secret Gardens of East Anglia* (Francis Lincoln, £20) will take you on a tour of 22 privately owned gardens in Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex, where challenges such as droughts have been turned to advantage to create beautiful and inspiring plots. A lovely book that will have you itching to visit some of them yourself.

garden notes



Everything you need to know to get the most from your plot in October

WORDS BY PAULA McWATERS

that an irksomely large shrub is finally reduced to the desired size.

Of course, some jobs have a definite window of opportunity that will slam shut if you leave it too long. Included in this is autumn sowing of hardy annual flower seeds. If they go in now, they will have a chance to build up a root system, resulting in stronger plants for next year. Top of my list are *Ammi majus*, *Ammi visnaga* and the soft apricot pot marigold *Calendula officinalis* 'Sunset Buff', along with a stunning white love-in-a-mist *Nigella hispanica* 'African Bride' (above left), which has rich purple-black stamens (chilternseeds.co.uk).

SAVE THE DATE: On 3 October all RHS gardens are open free of charge. See rhs.org.uk for details.

MY FAVOURITE gardening teacher Tessa always advised us that the best time to perform any given maintenance task in the garden is when you have the time and energy to do it. This realistic approach is one I can identify with as you can't always get round to moving or pruning plants when the books tell you to. So, while everything is a little quieter, and before bad weather sets in, I shall be nipping out to see what tasks are still outstanding. After all, sacrificing one year's flowers by cutting at 'the wrong time', for instance, is worth it if it means



WHAT TO DO

Plant any new herbaceous perennials to establish roots before winter

Harvest and store apples

Weed paths to neaten them for winter

Plant new rhubarb crowns and lift and divide old ones

Ripen squashes and pumpkins off the ground

Gather autumn leaves and store to make leaf mould

Prune and tie in stems of climbing roses to prevent wind rock

Plant garlic cloves in soil enriched with well-rotted organic matter

Clear old leaves around strawberries to prevent pest build-up

Begin sowing sweetpeas under cover in deep pots



Feet first

Horatio's Garden, a charity that creates wonderful accessible gardens in NHS spinal injury units around the country, has launched an array of attractive products to help with its fundraising efforts. These soft and colourful gardeners' socks are made in Dorset from naturally antiseptic alpaca wool and cost £18 per pair. See the whole range, which includes gloves, hand cream, mugs and notebooks, at horatiosgarden.org.uk.



Out & about

If it's a while since you have visited Cornwall's Eden Project – or you have never been – this is a great time of year to immerse yourself in a little Southern Hemisphere warmth and traverse the Canopy Walkway in the largest indoor rainforest in the world. New in the Mediterranean Biome is the Western Australia Garden (above), featuring the evocatively named and highly colourful kangaroo paws, pink and white wax flowers and exotic grass trees. Inspiring stuff. Tickets cost £25 in advance (01726 811911; edenproject.com).

Tip Plant bulbs in large black plastic pots to drop into borders and containers later. They will be easier to remove when flowering is over



SNIP SNIP SNIP

I bought a pair of these Okatsune thinning shears on the recommendation of a venerable gardening friend who has a large plot in Kent, and have been wedded to them ever since. With well-balanced handles and a V-shaped spring to evenly distribute the load, the tempered Japanese steel blades are super-sharp, while the pointed tips make them ideal for getting into tight places. They cost £12.22 from Quality Garden Tools (0800 783 2202; qualitygardentools.com).

1 HOUR to make a difference

If time is short, focus on one satisfying task – and the rest of the garden can wait



Make a pledge to grow some winter salads to see you through the shorter days ahead. Sow now into boxes of moist compost and keep by the back door to avoid getting wet feet trudging to the veg patch. Mizuna is easy to grow and tolerates half-shade (chilternseeds.co.uk). Mustard 'Red Frills' is a mild-flavoured, quick-growing cut-and-come-again leaf (dobies.co.uk). Winter purslane is succulent and hardy (marshalls-seeds.co.uk). And under cloches or in a cold greenhouse, sow some alpine lettuce 'Meraviglia d'Inverno San Martino', which can be harvested throughout winter (seedsofitaly.com). For more salad tips, see *The Good Life*.

EVENT Great Dixter Autumn Plant Fair is on 7-8 October, 11am-4pm; £9, includes entry to garden; under-16s free (01797 254048; greatdixter.co.uk)



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A *light touch*

A 16th-century Welsh farmhouse has been carefully renovated to combine its original character with contemporary living spaces

WORDS BY CAROLINE ATKINS ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK BOLTON ● STYLING BY BEN KENDRICK



You need to really love a place if you're going to spend a winter in it with no roof over your heads. That was the position Louisa Morgan and her husband Lee found themselves in when they took on their 16th-century farmhouse in the Usk Valley in Wales. They knew the property already, because Louisa kept her horses at stables there, and when the elderly owner died, his family gave them first option to buy it. Louisa and Lee jumped at the chance of a 25-acre smallholding still in one piece, but they also knew that renovating the Grade II-listed house – built of rubble-stone and with much of its original character knocked out in the 1960s – was going to be a massive project. So they made it habitable when they first moved here in 2008, then lived in it for six years, with their small son Henry (now seven), in order to have a clear idea of what it needed and get all the work done in one go.

That meant living with the builders for more than a year, but they now have a home that inhabits its valley as naturally as when it was built nearly five centuries ago, and whose light-filled rooms flow into one another with the clean lines and uncluttered surfaces of a more modern age. "The planning people let us do what we wanted inside," Louisa explains, "as long as we reinstated the external structural character." So she and Lee had the rubble-stone repointed with lime mortar, replaced the mullioned windows, added a green oak porch with a Welsh slate roof, and raised the chimney stacks to a height more in keeping with the building's size and proportions.

Key to the beautiful calm of the interior layout was the transformation of the leaky, flat-roofed strip that linked the main house to an old workshop and tackroom. This has become

OPPOSITE, FROM BELOW

LEFT A green oak porch with a Welsh slate roof was added; reconfiguring the older part of the property created a living space with room for a vintage dining table and chairs; bare-bulb lighting keeps the look simple and stylish **THIS PAGE** An exposed section of the original exterior wall makes an attractive feature



THIS PAGE Bedroom beams have been painted white to give an even lighter effect overhead
OPPOSITE, FROM TOP Dora the Jack Russell enjoys the comfort of a corner sofa, which adds contemporary style to the 16th-century property; in the en-suite bathroom, an old store cupboard has been converted into a wetroom





Limestone floors provide a unifying sweep of pale grey

a wide, white-walled hallway with a pitched roof and huge windows (their aluminium frames set into natural oak surrounds) that swing right open into the garden. An exposed stone wall at one end marks the boundary of the original wall, but new limestone floors (Louisa works as marketing director for Mandarin Stone) run beyond this and throughout the ground floor to provide a unifying sweep of textured pale grey underfoot. The old tackroom – now heated by a woodburning stove whose gleaming chimney follows the line of the high ceiling – has space for a sofa and low coffee tables as well as a steel-legged dining table (from Baileys), with a set of vintage chairs in dark-grained wood that adds warm texture to the cool background colours. The new kitchen, at the other end of the hallway, has been created by knocking three small rooms into a big open-plan living space that gets the afternoon sun. Some of the original timbers here are still visible between sections of limewashed wall, and the window lintels are old gate posts from one of the fields.

All the windows have been left uncurtained – upstairs in the bedrooms and bathrooms, too. “It’s not as though we’ve got any neighbours who could see in,” points out Louisa, and besides, she adds, the new windows keep the house so warm that they don’t





THIS PAGE, FROM BELOW Raised beds have been created in the vegetable plot, part of the 25 acres of land that came with the house; a marble-topped workstation was installed at one end of the long kitchen – concrete-effect Italian lights add overhead style; at the

dining end of the kitchen are a circular table and modernist chairs – the woven lampshade and basket are from Wyldwood Willow **OPPOSITE** Louisa's workbench, with its German ebay lamp, fits beneath the study window and matches the windowsill perfectly



need any extra insulation. So the beautiful lines of the original house acquire extra definition, and sunlight accents the roof angles and overhead beams, all painted white to lift the ceilings. A tiny bathroom was removed to open up a wide landing – big enough to have its own sofa – and a new one built under the eaves. It was important not to have water pipes running up the outside of the house, so these were installed behind a stairwell wall – and the bath had to be lifted in through the window aperture before the actual window was fitted. There's a more traditional feel to these upstairs rooms. An antique cane-woven steamer chair sits at one end of the bathroom, and in the main bedroom's en-suite, an old-fashioned wasstand is topped by a slab of marble and an enamel basin, with an old store room (possibly a game-hanging cupboard) lined with tiles to create a wetroom.

This Welsh farmhouse is a calm, comfortable home for a family who, some days, barely have time to stop. It was Louisa's horses that brought them here in the first place, but they now have hens, ducks and sheep (mostly Black Welsh Mountain ewes), too, as well as three cats and three dogs. Lee, from a farming background, has started keeping bees (there's a side table in the sitting room made from a beehive he has reconstructed) and has a business as a mobile farrier. Louisa works mostly from home, in the study – the place they end up spending most time, she says. It's lit with the subtle lamplight she prefers ("My favourite is the desk lamp that I found on German ebay – it's incredibly elegant, and old lamps were so well made"), and she can work at her bench and keep an eye on the land and the livestock: "If I see a sheep on its back, I can run to sort it out." And there aren't many offices you could say that about.

i For more on Mandarin Stone, visit mandarinstone.com.



*The beautiful lines of the original house
have acquired extra definition*

A gravel path winds through a garden filled with colorful dahlias and Michaelmas daisies. The path is flanked by dense plantings of flowers in various colors including red, orange, yellow, purple, and pink. In the background, there are tall evergreen trees and a fence. The scene is captured in a soft, natural light, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting.

The double dahlia border is backed by feather reed grass *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster', while the front edge is studded with clumps of Michaelmas daisies *Symphyotrichum novi-belgii* 'Lady in Blue' and *Aster x frikartii* 'Wunder von Stäfa'



STYLE

*Modern country garden
planting*

SEASONS OF INTEREST

*Midsummer
to late autumn*

SIZE

Several large borders

SOIL TYPE

*Clay loam improved
with mushroom compost*

Colour in every corner

Planted around a pottery in rural Oxfordshire,
an original garden with deep vibrant borders creates
a sense of intrigue wherever you turn

WORDS BY STEPHANIE MAHON • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLIVE NICHOLS



There are people so enthusiastic about what they do, you feel they must bound out of bed each morning, and the potter and gardener Stephen Baughan is one of them. He fizzles with energy – it's no wonder he restricts himself to just two coffees a day. This verve stood him in good stead as he started a business making ceramics – a subject he knew absolutely nothing about – and created a garden around it from scratch, armed with little but eagerness.

“Early on, I decided I wanted a career making something useful that people could interact with and that had longevity,” he explains, “so I started making mugs and jugs.” Aston Pottery in Oxfordshire has been going for 35 years now, growing from just a studio to include a visitor shop and café. The pieces Stephen and his team make are unusual in that they are made in small batches by machine and then decorated by stencilling, using unique processes created through trial and error.

This unorthodox approach extends beyond the pottery to a rather surprising garden, set out in a series of discreet borders around the buildings and car park. “We develop our ideas in isolation here,” Stephen says. “There is an awful lot of making it up as we go, with many mistakes on the way.” The first area he planted

was a strip along the front wall. “It was a business proposition at the start, to draw in custom by enticing people to visit us on warm sunny days,” he says. With no real horticultural experience, but growing some vegetables as a child, he threw himself into the project with gusto, decorating the outside areas of the pottery as colourfully as he would one of his plates.

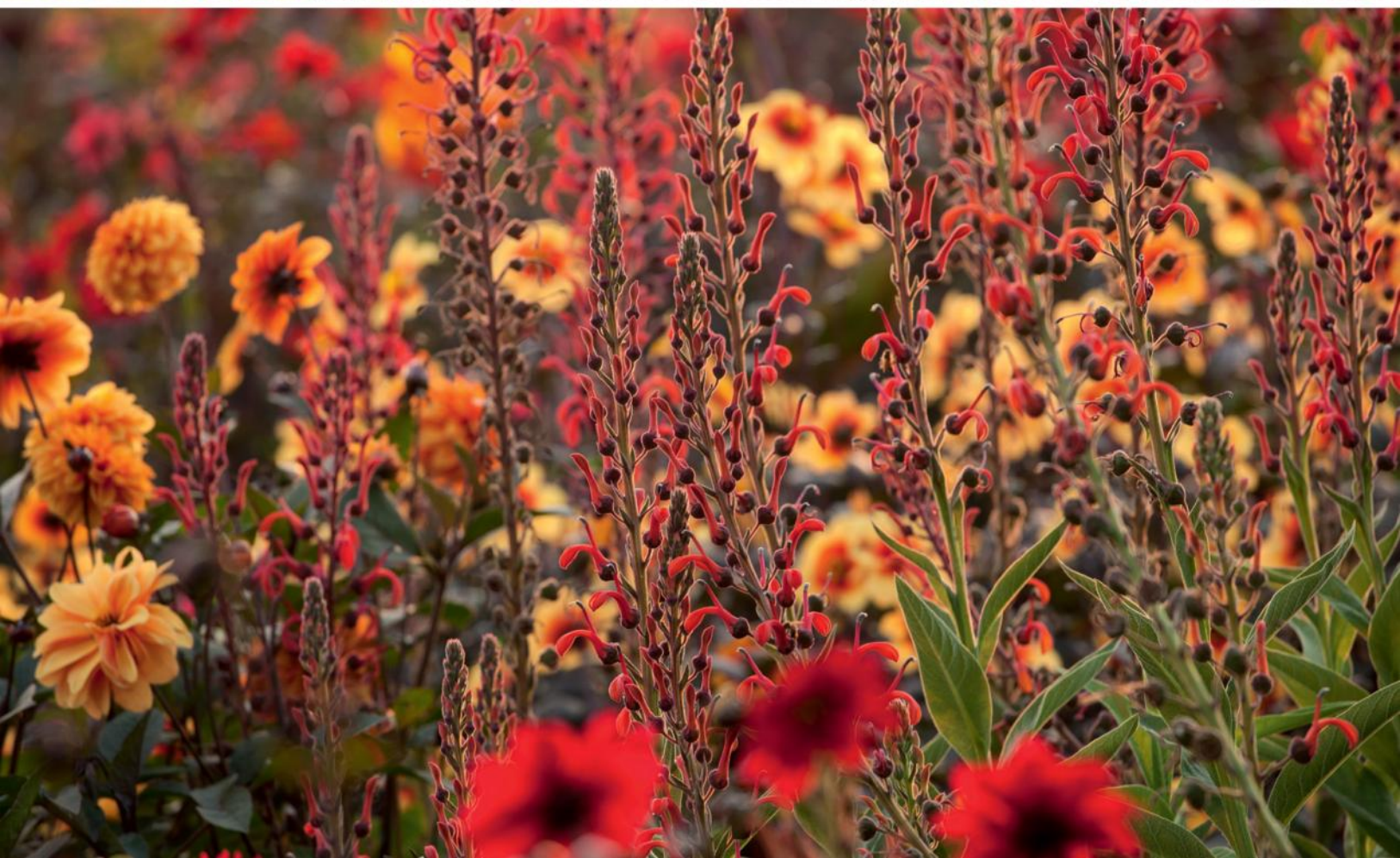
“I choose plants that I like, not plants that necessarily go together,” he laughs. “For 20 years I’ve carried notebooks with me wherever I go, in which I write down plants I’ve seen, and, when I note the same one three times over a few years, I know I really like it.” The front border stands seven metres deep, and is packed with perennials such as persicaria, sedums and phlox in quite a traditional style, backed by Cotswold stone walls, and framed by crafted split-oak fencing. The adjoining path is lined with pots bursting with agapanthus and pineapple lilies.

This path leads out to the large car park, where Stephen has made his second area. “Having got the bug, I wanted to make a double border, so I created a walkway right down the centre, with a boundary of hornbeam trees. Of course, we can’t have lawn, so I have enclosed the path, making a tunnel of foliage.”

A pavilion with seating at the end creates a focal point beyond the beds of late-summer flowers, including echinacea, salvias, crocosmia and

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP LEFT *Zinnia* ‘Benary’s Giant Pink’ and *Agastache rugosa* make a winning combination; *Helianthus* ‘Lemon Queen’ grows up to two metres tall; plants for Stephen’s riotous annual border are raised from seed in his polytunnel and include *Cosmos sulphureus*, *Tagetes* ‘Orange Gem’, *Calendula* ‘Orange Surprise’ and *Tithonia* ‘Fiesta del Sol’

OPPOSITE, ABOVE Great mounds of vivid yellow *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *deamii* stand out among asters and salvias in the double borders leading to the car park **BELOW** Spires of flame-coloured *Lobelia tupa* rise up through ‘David Howard’ and ‘Moonfire’ dahlias





5 OF STEPHEN'S FAVOURITE DAHLIAS

1 'Inglebrook Jill'

This collarette has velvet-burgundy outer petals that cup raspberry-ripple ones.

2 'Danum Torch'

Stephen particularly loves collarette-type dahlias such as this one, which is suitable for growing in containers.

3 'Weston Spanish Dancer'

This red and yellow miniature cactus dahlia is an all-time favourite. Stephen grows his from cuttings from the National Dahlia Collection in Cornwall (nationaldahliacollection.co.uk).

4 'Bryce B Morrison'

A fun, frou-frou, bi-coloured decorative type that will add drama to a border.

5 'Barbarry Gem'

This dark miniature ball dahlia is great for cutting, with great stems that are long lasting in the vase.



rudbeckias. At the back stand towering *Helianthus* 'Lemon Queen', reaching up more than two metres to touch the bottom leaves of the hornbeams, which Stephen will start pleaching next year ("No idea how to do it yet," he admits, "but we will give it a try").

To the side of the parking area is his dahlia garden, another double border. This is split into compartments of 12 dahlias each, framed with tall ornamental grasses such as *molinia* and *calamagrostis*, and edged with *agapanthus* and *asters*. Here, he can indulge his obsession with all sorts of dahlias, from collarettes and balls to waterlily and cactus types. "My absolute favourite is the decorative 'Ballego's Glory'," he says. "I love yellow and red and bicolor dahlias, and this one is all three."

Along the back lies Stephen's annual border, inspired by the "completely stunning" one at Nymans garden in Sussex. He and his helpers plant it up in late May with cosmos, nicotiana, sunflowers and flame-coloured *Lobelia tupa* grown in his polytunnel from seeds and cuttings, and by July it is a riot of colour and texture that goes on until the first frosts. At the other end, Stephen is crafting his masterwork: the

'hot' bank. When building the café foundations, they had to dig a large hole and dump the soil at the end of the site, creating a ridge 20m deep by 3m high. Stephen put a copper beech hedge at the top, and then focused on planting the slope with yellow, red and orange flowers. There are dahlias and penstemons, but also more exotic canna lilies, *ricinus*, *eremurus* and bananas, all of which he can leave in over winter, as the bank drains so well. Everything flowers right into autumn. "We want plants that give us three or four months of interest," he says, "so we have lots of salvias, *alstroemeria* and *kniphofia*."

Stephen says this bank is the hardest task he has ever had in his life. "But I like experimentation and the surprise of how projects turn out. Some ideas work, some don't, but you get an evolution. If it's wrong, you can do it differently next year. That's the great thing about making a garden – you can do what you like and keep making it up as you go along."

i *Aston Pottery, The Stables, Kingsway Farm, Aston, Oxfordshire (01993 852031; astonpottery.co.uk). Open every day.*

OPPOSITE At the edge of the hot bank, dahlias 'David Howard', 'Bishop of Llandaff' and 'Ballego's Glory' are partnered with long-lasting alstroemerias, magenta-pink *Salvia microphylla* 'Watermelon Pink' and zingy red 'Royal Bumble'





Stylish SIMPLICITY



Blending weathered furniture and warm textured tones has turned a Cotswold cottage into a welcoming family home and inspirational workplace for illustrator-designer Sam Wilson

WORDS AND STYLING BY SIAN WILLIAMS • PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIDGET PEIRSON



THIS PAGE The Cotswold-stone cottage has been sensitively extended – a muted backdrop showcases Sam’s nature-themed designs perfectly
OPPOSITE An old wire bed base serves as an inspiring moodboard



aking in the panoramic view of the frosted landscape from the large kitchen window, you can easily understand why linoprint artist Sam Wilson and her husband Mark moved to this idyllic part of rural Gloucestershire. “It’s wonderful here, especially in autumn and winter,” she says. “On cold evenings, we either warm up by the Aga in the kitchen or make a log fire in the living room and light beeswax candles.”

Their home, originally a two-up, two-down, 17th-century workman’s cottage in the hamlet of Saintbury, not far from Chipping Campden and Broadway, is part of a row of cottages on a quiet country lane that gives a real feeling of stepping back in time.

However, Sam and Mark, who runs an illustration agency from home, had pretty much dismissed the house when they first viewed it in January 2012, wanting to move into the area with their children, Molly, 11, and George, 13. “It wasn’t in great condition,” Sam remembers. “We lived in a beautiful barn conversion before in Staffordshire, so it became really hard to find something to match that in the Cotswolds.” The amount of surrounding land eventually swung their decision to move in later that summer.

In the property, rooms were all a good size but in real need of modernisation and there was no central heating. The previous owners had added a large two-storey extension in the 1980s. “Everything authentic architecturally had either been pulled out or boarded over,” Sam recalls. “Our aim was to bring back the real character of the original cottage and make the more recent ➔



INTERIORS

Sam and Mark at their long kitchen table, which they have teamed with a mix of vintage chairs. The pale-coloured walls and floor enhance the spacious feel



"Our aim was to bring back the real character of the original cottage"

additions blend in." For 18 months the family lived in one room while builders put back many of the traditional features, such as the stone floor that runs throughout the downstairs, and the cottage-style plank-and-latch doors, and reconfigured the upper floor to create more bathroom space. "Much of our furniture was too big but we managed to keep the large sofas and our lovely old kitchen table," Sam says.

A lot of time was then spent scouring the local area looking for furniture and accessories at antiques fairs, auctions and car-boot sales. For the kitchen, simple Shaker-style units were bought from a company in Burton-on-Trent and then hand-painted by Mark. For an unfitted look, the couple added open shelving and a large freestanding larder, inherited from Sam's parents, originally red but now painted off-white to suit the pale colour scheme.

In the new family room, a lantern roof and large folding doors at the back increase the amount of light, while a solid stone lintel, sourced from a local reclamation yard, now sits above a traditional log burner. In a quiet corner next to the hallway, an old wooden market table backed by a child's vintage wire bed base has been cleverly fashioned into an inspirational workspace for Sam.

Upstairs in the main bedroom in the older part of the cottage, beams were exposed and stripped back, and in the bathroom a bespoke sink unit with shutter-style doors and a reclaimed wooden top has been painted a soft grey. "We've taken pleasure in adding character and lots more texture to the house," Sam says, "by collecting and finding special pieces over time as well as introducing some of my own designs to break up the simplicity" ➔



THIS PAGE, FROM ABOVE

A decorative table and chairs from Majorca offer a welcome spot to sit beneath a mature apple tree; the golden Cotswold stone contrasts with the sunbleached teak furniture; a marbled kitchen worktop is a smart feature; receptacles, including a cupboard that was a flea-market find, display a selection of plants



The main bedroom in the eaves has natural textiles, including a reindeer-skin rug, for warmth and texture





CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE
Son George's bedroom is a contrast to the rest of the house, with deep navy walls and bright red accessories;

Sam and Mark's shop in Chipping Campden; wooden frames, hooks and a bath rack introduce a rustic edge to the stylish bathroom

of the room schemes." While transforming their home, two years ago the couple launched a new company, Sam Wilson Studio, selling textiles, china, artwork and stationery in Sam's nature-inspired prints, and have recently opened a shop in Chipping Campden. Winning a place at *Country Living's* Pop-up Market in 2015 gave them the confidence to set up their new venture.

The home and business are extensions of one another, with new products constantly being tried and tested in the house and shop. "Although it's taken us a while to feel the cottage is truly our home after the turmoil of renovations, we are growing to love it more and more," Sam says. "The mature garden we inherited is full of the most beautiful flowers in spring and summer, and the surrounding landscape is so calming and therapeutic. Every morning I go for a walk across the fields or woodland before heading to my desk at home to work – I really can't think of a better way to start the day."

i Visit samwilsonstudio.com or call 01386 852794.

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GARDENING

A sense

On the Sussex High Weald, this tranquil and captivating garden has now blended seamlessly into its rural surroundings



STYLE

An Arts & Crafts-influenced garden, set around a traditional-style Sussex farmhouse

SEASONS OF INTEREST

Designed to provide interest throughout the year

SIZE

4½ acres, set within meadows

SOIL TYPE

Heavy Wealden clay, improved with organic matter, compost and well-rotted manure

of place

WORDS BY PAULA McWATERS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY

SUZIE GIBBONS



There are occasions in life when you just know instinctively that something is right. Ian Smith and Debbie Roberts of Acres Wild garden design had that feeling when they went to visit the building site of a new house on the Sussex High Weald. "It slopes gently down towards the west and has glorious views over meadows, woodland and distant downland. It was a clean slate and we could see the plot's potential straightaway," Ian says.

The owner's brief was simple: "Make us a garden that looks as though it has always been here." That's easier to say than to achieve, especially when confronted by vast piles of spoil from newly built house foundations. But Acres Wild enjoy the challenge of what Ian calls invisible design: "We like people to feel that the way you move through a garden is completely natural. The path you're walking along should feel as though it's always been there, not something that's been imposed."

This was especially important at Brightling Down Farm where the house was designed in the vernacular style with reclaimed materials and the garden needed to fit seamlessly around it. Less than 15 years on, it sits comfortably in its rural surroundings. "The owners are not expert gardeners, so,

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Glowing *Liquidambar styraciflua* underplanted with sedums and grasses; fluffy flowerheads of

Pennisetum alopecuroides; *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' leaf shimmers in early morning light **OPPOSITE** Meandering paths lead between pines and *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood'



DESIGN TIPS FROM ACRES WILD

There are two ways to disguise the edges of a pond that has an artificial liner: create a damp bog garden area with suitable marginal planting, or choose plants that give the same reed-like look but are happy to grow in drier soil, eg hemerocallis, miscanthus and molinia.

Use specimen plants as eye-catchers, especially where they can be viewed across water and reflected in it.

On a curving path, put in an attractive shrub or tree on the inside of a bend and then repeat it further along on the other side to give the impression that the path has had to curve around them. It lends a sense of maturity.

Plant grasses in drifts – as generously as your budget and space allow – to increase impact.

Choose natural materials where possible, especially reclaimed bricks, tiles and wood, to give a weathered look.



after expressing their colour preferences, they were happy to leave the specific plant choices to us," Ian says. They are highly appreciative of what has been created for them and rely on their talented gardening team to tend it.

Grasses have been used extensively, especially around the interconnecting ponds down the hillside north of the house. Myriad paths weave through this area, criss-crossing the water over zig-zag wooden bridges or large flat stepping stones. The soothing sound of waterfalls is ever-present. Striking specimen trees include a wonderful liquidambar and Japanese maples, *Acer japonicum* 'Aconitifolium' and *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood', both beautifully reflected in the water.

While the area immediately around the house was tackled first, with stone terraces and a pergola walkway that leads off to one side, a masterplan was drawn up for the whole site so that distinct areas could be built in stages over several years. A walled kitchen garden provides all the vegetables and fruit the owners need, including salads all year round, and chard, kale and leeks in winter. The crops are interspersed with pot marigolds, nasturtiums and dahlias, giving punches of colour among the produce. Initially, Ian specified walls on three sides and a yew hedge on the third, but the south-westerly winds proved too drying and now a fourth wall has been added. With its thoughtful design and use of weathered materials, it is hard to distinguish it from a real Victorian kitchen garden. Elsewhere there are deep herbaceous borders and wide lawns, which

LEFT Purbeck stone has been artfully arranged to create naturalistic waterfalls

and stepping-stone bridges
ABOVE Massed grasses bring softness and movement



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LAWRENCE**

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LIGHTING & HOME





ABOVE Late crops of beans, courgettes, mustard leaves and kale abound in the kitchen garden **RIGHT** Stone

setts form a chequered path to a formal knot garden linking the pergola walk to the kitchen garden

make the garden ideal for entertaining. A tennis court and a swimming pool are carefully screened by both layout and planting to prevent these relatively modern features from intruding into the subtly maintained maturity of the site.

Ian and Debbie have taken a broad brush to the planting, colouring the borders with sweeps of sedums and grasses that give the garden a strong presence and framework. The policy has been to plant densely and then to adapt and edit the palette whenever things don't work. As the garden is plagued by deer and rabbits, certain mass plantings have been chosen not only because they look good but because they don't get chewed.

In the Japanese garden, a secluded area surrounded by woodland, Ian and Debbie have provided the 'essence' of Japan in their plant choices rather than following the style slavishly. Alongside specimen acers, both hebes and *Lonicera nitida* are clipped into domes to provide an undulating green backdrop. "The idea was to create a tranquil area ideal for lingering and switching off from the outside world," Ian says. That's something anyone would welcome. 🏡

📍 *Brightling Down Farm is open for ngs.org.uk by appointment only; from May to October for groups of ten-30 (valstephens@icloud.com; 01424 838888). Acres Wild (01403 891084; acreswild.co.uk).*



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Harvest suppers

In the vegetable garden, there's still an abundance of marvellous produce to use in the kitchen. Try these delicious ideas

RECIPES BY ALISON WALKER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HOUSE OF PICTURES/ANNA KERN

STYLING BY SANNA FYRING LIEDGREN

HERITAGE CARROT, ORANGE AND SPINACH SALAD

Preparation 15 minutes, plus standing Cooking 25 minutes

Serves 4-6

Look out for colourful heritage carrots at your local farmer's market or greengrocer – the usual orange variety is just as tasty if you can't find them.

300g baby carrots, mixed varieties and colours
3 tbsp olive oil
1 orange, cut into wedges, plus the juice of ½ orange
½ tbsp red wine vinegar
50g baby spinach leaves
a small handful of mint leaves
75g black olives

FOR THE PICKLED

RED ONION

175ml white wine vinegar
2 tbsp sugar
1 medium red onion, finely sliced in half moons

1 To make the pickle, heat the vinegar and sugar in a pan with ½ tsp salt until dissolved. Pack the onion

into a jar (or put into a bowl) and pour over the hot vinegar. Leave for at least 30 minutes (the pickle should be at room temperature when served).

2 Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. Put the carrots in one layer on a lipped roasting tray; halve any large ones so they are all the same size and cook evenly. Drizzle with 2 tbsp oil and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Roast for 20-25 minutes until tender and tinged

golden. Set aside to cool to room temperature.

3 To make the dressing, pour the orange juice, remaining olive oil and red wine vinegar into a screw-top jar along with salt and pepper and shake to emulsify. Check the seasoning.

4 Put the carrots, spinach, mint and olives into a bowl and toss with the dressing. Transfer to a serving plate and garnish with the orange wedges and some of the pickled onions. Serve the rest of the onions alongside. ➔





WHOLE TROUT WITH ROASTED FENNEL AND ALMONDS

Preparation 25 minutes Cooking 50 minutes Serves 4

Choose fennel bulbs with frondy stems so you can use them to flavour the trout.

3-4 fennel bulbs, depending on size (about 750g)
2 tbsp olive oil
1.5kg whole trout, gutted and cleaned
40g panko breadcrumbs
zest of 2 oranges
2 handfuls of rocket leaves
2 lemons
extra-virgin olive oil
100g manchego, cubed
30g salted roasted almonds

1 Heat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan oven) gas mark 5. Halve the fennel, removing

the outer layer if it is bruised or blemished. (Reserve the fronds for the fish.) Slice in half top to bottom, then cut each piece into four wedges. Spread in one layer in a roasting pan and drizzle with the oil. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Roast for 20-25 minutes until golden-tinged and tender. Set aside to cool slightly while you cook the fish.

- 2 Turn up the oven temperature to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. Season the cavity of the fish and put the frondy fennel stems inside. Lay the fish in an oiled roasting pan.
- 3 Mix together the panko breadcrumbs with the orange zest. Season and sprinkle over the fish. Bake for 20-25 minutes until the flesh flakes from the bone.
- 4 Arrange the baked fennel on a serving platter with the rocket leaves. Squeeze over juice of 1 lemon and drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil. Scatter with the manchego and almonds. Serve with the fish and extra lemon wedges.



BEETROOT SOUP WITH HORSERADISH CREAM

Preparation 25 minutes

Cooking 40 minutes Serves 4

Rapeseed oil has a slightly earthy flavour that works well with the beetroot. If you don't have access to dill flowers, garnish with freshly chopped dill herb instead.

2 tbsp rapeseed oil
1 medium onion, chopped
450g raw beetroot, peeled
1 small garlic clove, crushed
1 large potato (about 200g), roughly chopped
330ml-400ml hot vegetable stock
2 thick slices of day-old sourdough bread (crusts removed), cubed
2 tbsp garlic oil
2 tbsp hot horseradish cream
100ml soured cream
a squeeze of lemon juice
dill flowers (or chopped dill), to garnish (optional)

- 1 Heat the rapeseed oil in a large, deep pan and gently fry the onion with a large pinch of salt for 20 minutes until softened.
- 2 Chop the beetroot in a food processor or grate by hand. Stir the garlic, beets and potato into the onion. Cook for 1 minute. Pour in the stock and season well. Bring to the boil, then cover and simmer for 15-20 minutes until the beets are tender and give when pressed against the back of a wooden spoon.
- 3 Meanwhile, heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Toss the bread in the garlic oil and spread on a baking sheet in one layer. Bake for 10 minutes until golden and crisp, turning halfway through. Set aside to cool. (They will keep for up to a week in an airtight container.)
- 4 Mix together the horseradish and soured cream and season with

the lemon juice, salt and freshly ground black pepper.

- 5 Blitz the soup in batches in a blender or food processor until smooth. Return to the rinsed-out pan. Adjust the consistency with a little extra stock if necessary. Reheat gently without boiling and check the seasoning. Serve hot or chilled with a spoonful of the horseradish cream, croutons and a few of the dill flowers. ➤

Different
beetroot
varieties
are
versatile
and tasty





BAKED ONIONS WITH PANCETTA AND CREAM

Preparation 15 minutes

Cooking 40 minutes Serves 4-6

This recipe works well as a side dish to serve with roast beef or as a simple supper with salad and good bread to mop up the sauce.

6 red onions, peeled but left whole

2 large sprigs of rosemary, plus extra to garnish

75g smoked pancetta

a splash of white wine or water

300ml double cream

- 1 Put the onions into a large pan of water with one of the rosemary sprigs and bring to the boil. Cover and simmer gently for 10-20 minutes, depending on the size of the onions, until tender but still holding their shape. Drain, reserving 50ml of the cooking water, and leave until cool enough to handle.
- 2 Gently fry the pancetta in a small pan to release its fat, then turn up the heat to medium and cook until golden. Tip into a bowl, then deglaze the pan with a large splash of white wine or water. Add the deglazing juices to the onion water.
- 3 Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. Halve the onions vertically and arrange in one layer in a roasting pan. Roughly chop the leaves of the remaining rosemary sprig and scatter over the onions along with the pancetta. Mix the onion/deglazing water with the cream and season with a little salt and freshly ground black pepper, then pour over and around the onions. Bake for 20 minutes until golden and the sauce is bubbling. Scatter with fresh rosemary leaves if you like. ➔



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AUBERGINE, TOMATO AND FETA BAKE

Preparation 25 minutes Cooking 1 hour Serves 4-6

To save time, this dish can be assembled in advance, chilled, then cooked the next day.

1 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for brushing
1 small onion, chopped
1 garlic clove, crushed
1 bay leaf
75g red lentils
1 tsp tomato purée
400g tin tomatoes
325ml hot vegetable stock or water
pinch of caster sugar
2 tbsp freshly chopped oregano leaves, plus extra to garnish
325g medium waxy potatoes, such as Désirée, peeled and sliced into 5mm rounds
1 large aubergine (about 350g), sliced widthways

3 large tomatoes, sliced horizontally
200g feta cheese

- 1 Heat the oil in a medium pan and gently fry the onion and garlic with the bay leaf and a pinch of salt for 10 minutes until softened. Add the lentils, purée, tinned tomatoes, stock or water and a pinch of caster sugar. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 20 minutes until almost tender and thickened. Stir in the oregano.
- 2 Put the potatoes in a pan of salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for

5 minutes until just tender. Drain and leave to dry in the colander.

- 3 Heat a griddle pan until hot. Brush the aubergine slices with oil. Griddle for a couple of minutes each side until golden and tender but not soggy. Set aside.
- 4 Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. To assemble, lightly oil a large ovenproof dish. Arrange the potatoes in one layer on the base, followed by a few spoonfuls of the tomato sauce. Cover with tomato slices, more sauce, aubergine slices, then a layer of sauce. Crumble over the feta. Bake for 20-30 minutes until cooked through and the feta is tinged golden. Garnish with oregano leaves. 🍴

Give bees a chance

We owe a lot to the humble honey bee and Eat Natural is creating a community to help them thrive

They may be small, but bees have a big job to do – their pollination is directly responsible for one third of all the food we eat. Sadly, changes in agricultural practice mean that, while a century ago there were more than a million hives in Britain, numbers are now dwindling. Thankfully the people at Eat Natural are passionate about investing in the future of bees. Honey is at the heart of everything they do – not just because it's delicious, but because the industrious insects that make it are vital to the entire ecosystem. There's one key thing standing between bees and extinction: and that's beekeepers – and you could be one of them. Last year, Eat Natural created a buzz by recruiting 25 beekeepers. Now they are looking to grow their community by recruiting another 50 this year. Successful 'new-bees' will receive all the equipment to get started – such as protective clothing, tools and a state-of-the-art beehive, alongside lots of help and support – all for free. Visit eatnatural.co.uk/pollination to apply and help our hives thrive.



Meet Sam – an organic farmer with big plans for the future and one of Eat Natural's latest recruits. As the owner of a sheep and dairy farm, he hopes to set up a creamery where he will combine fresh milk from his Jersey-cross cows with honey from his Eat Natural bees. After receiving full training and a beehive fitted with hive-monitoring technology, he's making his own honey and helping to reverse the threat to these incredible insects.



Could you be a beekeeper? Fill out the form and answer three simple questions at eatnatural.co.uk/pollination. Applications open until 31 October 2017.

Sweet flavours of AUTUMN

Comforting puddings made with the best of the season's produce are the perfect choice for chilly days

RECIPES AND FOOD STYLING BY ALISON WALKER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TARA FISHER

STYLING BY WEI TANG



SPICED PUMPKIN AND WALNUT TART

Preparation 35 minutes, plus chilling Cooking about 55 minutes Serves 6-8

Pumpkin is one of those marvellous vegetables that can be used in both sweet and savoury recipes – here, it's matched with aromatic spices and a sweet walnut pastry to make a creamy-textured moreish tart.

3 large eggs, beaten
200g soured cream
125g light muscovado sugar
1 tsp ground ginger
½ tsp each ground cinnamon and cloves
zest of 1 lemon
425g tin pumpkin purée (or the same weight of cooked, puréed pumpkin)

1 medium egg, beaten, to glaze

FOR THE PASTRY

225g plain flour
115g cold butter, diced
50g caster sugar
125g ground walnuts*
1 medium egg yolk, beaten with 2 tbsp ice-cold water

smooth. Roll to 2mm thick and cut out leaf shapes. Put on a flour-dusted board and chill until needed.

- 4 Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. Put a baking tray inside to heat up. Line the pastry with a circle of crumpled baking parchment and baking beans. Bake for

10-12 minutes until the sides have set. Remove the paper and beans, and bake for 5 minutes until the base feels dry and sandy. Cool, then remove from the tin.

- 5 Turn down the temperature to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Briefly beat together the large eggs, cream, sugar, spices and zest, then blend

in the pumpkin. Put the pastry case on a baking sheet and pour in the pumpkin mixture. Arrange the leaves around the edge. Carefully brush with the beaten egg. Bake for 30-35 minutes until the tart wobbles slightly in the centre. Serve warm or chilled with cream or ice cream. 

- 1 To make the pastry, put the flour into a bowl and rub in the butter until it resembles breadcrumbs. Stir in the sugar and ground walnuts. Stirring with a flat-bladed knife, add enough of the yolk and water until the mixture clumps together. Bring together with the tips of your fingers into a ball. Knead on a lightly floured worksurface until smooth. Flatten into a disc, wrap in clingfilm and chill for 20 minutes.

- 2 Lightly dust the worksurface again with flour. Roll out the pastry to a 3mm thickness and line a 4cm-deep, 22cm-round loose-bottomed flan tin. Prick the base with a fork and trim the edges. Chill until cold or pop in the freezer for 10 minutes.

- 3 Gather up the trimmings and knead briefly until



**SALTED CARAMEL
APPLE, PEAR AND
BLACKBERRY
CRUMBLES**

Preparation 20 minutes

Cooking 25 minutes Serves 6

A variation on a traditional crumble, this combines a crunchy pecan and oat topping with sticky salted caramel-covered fruit.

500g Bramley apples, peeled, cored and chopped
50g light muscovado sugar
zest and juice of 1 lemon
3 pears, peeled, cored and chopped
200g blackberries
6 tsp salted caramel spread

FOR THE TOPPING

85g plain flour
60g cold butter, diced
30g caster sugar
30g porridge oats
100g pecan nuts, roughly chopped

- 1 Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. Put the apple, muscovado sugar, lemon zest and juice in a small pan and cook over a medium-to-low heat for 5 minutes until the fruit just starts to soften.
- 2 Stir in the pears and blackberries and divide between 6 x 200ml deep ramekins. Drop a teaspoon of the salted caramel on top of each pudding.
- 3 For the topping, put the flour and butter into a bowl and rub together until coarsely flaky. Stir in the caster sugar, oats and nuts. Spread evenly over the fruit and bake in the oven for 15 minutes. Turn down the temperature to 190°C (170°C fan oven) gas mark 5 and cook for another 15-20 minutes until the topping is golden and the fruit is bubbling. Serve with plenty of vanilla custard, clotted cream or ice cream.



BLACKBERRY AND GINGER HAT

Preparation 30 minutes

Cooking 1 hour 40 minutes

Serves 6

This is lighter than traditional versions as it uses butter instead of suet.

300g blackberries
115g caster sugar, plus 1 tbsp
115g butter, softened, plus
extra for greasing
2 large eggs, beaten
1 tsp vanilla extract
115g self-raising flour, sifted
½ tsp baking powder
50g ground almonds

1 tbsp milk
2 balls stem ginger, diced
2 tbsp creme de mure

- 1 Put the blackberries and 1 tbsp sugar into a small pan and cook for 5-10 minutes until softened – if you prefer a finer texture, push the mixture through a sieve, otherwise set aside to cool.
- 2 Grease a 1-litre pudding basin with butter and put in half the cooled fruit. Cut out a rectangle each of foil and greaseproof paper large enough to cover the basin, then fold across the

middle to form a pleat (to allow the pudding to expand during cooking). Set aside.

- 3 Put the remaining butter and caster sugar into a bowl and mix with electric hand beaters until fluffy and lighter in colour. Beat in the eggs, beating well between additions, then the vanilla.
- 4 Fold in the rest of the ingredients except the liqueur, then turn into the basin. Put the foil and greaseproof paper on top, with the foil uppermost, and tie around the rim with string. Trim paper and foil

so it doesn't touch the water.

- 5 Put the pudding in a large pan sitting on an upturned saucer and fill with enough boiling water to come halfway up the basin side. Cover and simmer for 1½ hours, checking the water level from time to time.
- 6 Stir the liqueur into the remaining blackberries and heat until warm.
- 7 Loosen the edges of the pudding with a round-bladed knife and turn out onto a plate. Pour the sauce over the top. Serve with custard or cream. ➔



FIG, CHOCOLATE AND VANILLA CHEESECAKE

Preparation 30 minutes, plus chilling Cooking about 50 minutes Makes 10-12 slices

This sublime combination makes a sophisticated pudding for a special occasion.

FOR THE BASE

250g choc chip cookies
50g unsalted butter, melted

FOR THE FILLING

400g full-fat cream cheese
150g caster sugar
200ml soured cream
1 tsp vanilla bean paste

3 medium eggs

TO FINISH

25g plain chocolate, broken into pieces
10-12 fresh figs

- 1 Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan) gas mark 4. Line a 20cm spring-form round cake tin with baking parchment.
- 2 To make the base, whiz the biscuits in a food processor until chopped. Transfer to a bowl and stir in the butter until the crumbs are coated. Press the mixture into the

base of the cake tin with the back of a spoon and cook for 10-12 minutes. Lower the temperature to 160°C (140°C fan) gas mark 3.

- 3 For the filling, beat the cream cheese until smooth with a wooden spoon. Stir in the sugar, cream and vanilla bean paste. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, until just smooth (don't overdo this or the mixture will crack on cooling), then pour the mixture onto the base. Cook for 30-35 minutes until just set. Carefully

run a knife between the edge of the cheesecake and the tin – again this will help to stop it cracking as it cools. Cool on a wire rack, then chill thoroughly.

- 4 Put the chocolate in a heatproof pan over a pan of gently simmering water, leave to melt, then stir until smooth. Remove the cheesecake from the tin and put on a serving plate. Halve the figs and pile on top. Drizzle with the melted chocolate and serve. ➔



Homegrown goodness

Embrace the change of season with organic British produce



As the summer sun fades, it leaves an afterglow in ripe fruit. And what could epitomise the British orchard more than the apple? When it comes to that staple, apple pie, Bramleys are best – they break down into a perfect purée yet keep that all-important flavour, which is why bestselling yogurt producer Yeo Valley has been searching for an organic Bramley supplier for years. When the folks at Yeo Valley finally found Eric Rowlands in East

Sussex, it was worth the wait. Yeo knows organic food works wonders for the earth and the people who produce it, as well as winning the taste test, so are celebrating Organic September in conjunction with the Soil Association by launching its Limited Edition British Bramley Apple Yogurt. Like plum crumble or blackberry cobbler, this sweet treat is a seasonal delight – combining Eric's organic apples with fresh milk from British family farms. It's as homegrown as yogurt gets.

Yeo Valley Limited Edition British Bramley Apple Yogurt is available now from supermarkets. To find out about more about its Fruit Quest, visit yeovalley.co.uk.

Join Yeo Valley in a celebration of British produce by indulging in a limited-edition flavour



**HAZELNUT GELATO**

*Preparation 30 minutes,
plus chilling and freezing
Makes about 1 litre*

This ice cream has a gentle flavour. If you want a more obvious taste, steep the nuts in the milk overnight.

100g hazelnuts, toasted
160g caster sugar
500ml whole milk
4 large egg yolks
1 tsp vanilla extract
150ml double cream
3 heaped tbsp chocolate
hazelnut spread
2 tbsp toasted chopped
hazelnuts

- 1 Grind the nuts in a food processor with 50g sugar until finely chopped - be careful not to over-process as they will become oily. Blend in a splash or two of the milk for 30 seconds.
- 2 Put the remaining milk and hazelnut mixture into a pan and bring to a rolling boil. Remove from the heat and leave to infuse until cold.
- 3 Strain the nut milk through a muslin-lined sieve into a clean pan (squeezing the nuts to obtain as much flavour as possible) and put over a medium heat to warm through.
- 4 Mix together the yolks and remaining sugar in a bowl with a pinch of salt. Blend the warm milk into the yolk mixture.
- 5 Return the milk to the cleaned-out pan and cook over a medium-to-low heat, stirring constantly until the mixture has thickened enough to coat the back of a wooden spoon. Be careful not to overheat or the mixture will curdle.
- 6 Pass the mixture through a sieve (to remove eggy threads) into a chilled bowl. Stir in the vanilla extract. Chill until cold.
- 7 Churn the hazelnut custard and cream together in an electric ice-cream maker according to the instructions or put in the freezer and beat every two hours until smooth. Once the ice cream has reached a creamy consistency, transfer to a freezerproof container, adding small dollops of chocolate spread and swirling with a skewer to create ripples. Sprinkle the nuts over the surface. Leave to freeze completely. Remove about 20 minutes before serving. 🍴

Pål is a traditional Norwegian fisherman. But he won't mind if you cook something more modern.

How about haddock fillets and salsa verde served on a parsley mash? Quick, simple and perfect for something different in the middle of the week. For the full recipe, visit seafoodfromnorway.co.uk

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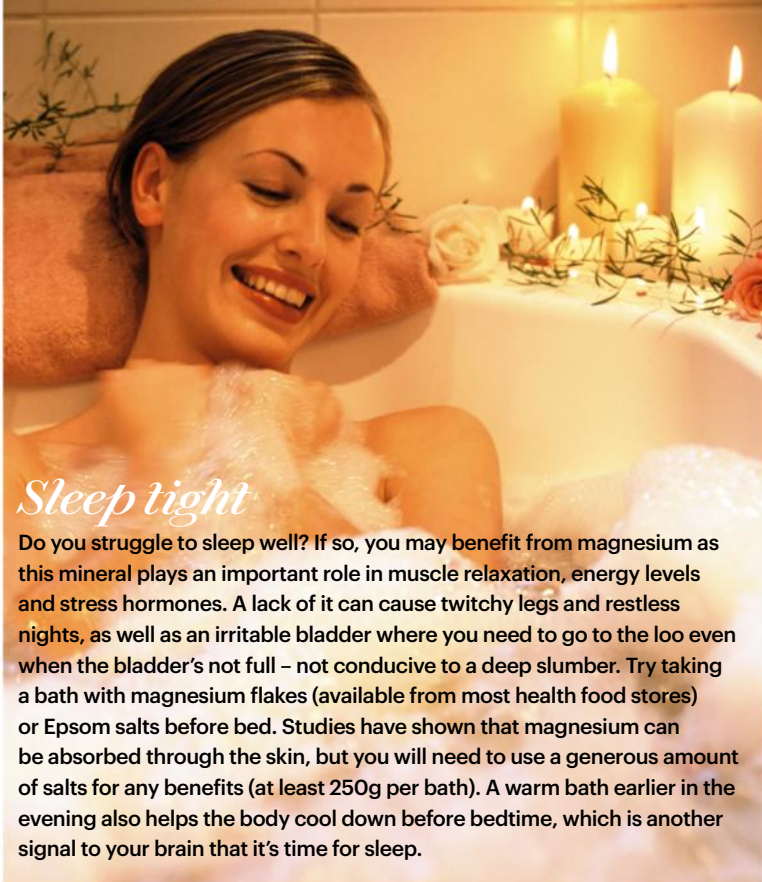
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Sleep tight

Do you struggle to sleep well? If so, you may benefit from magnesium as this mineral plays an important role in muscle relaxation, energy levels and stress hormones. A lack of it can cause twitchy legs and restless nights, as well as an irritable bladder where you need to go to the loo even when the bladder's not full – not conducive to a deep slumber. Try taking a bath with magnesium flakes (available from most health food stores) or Epsom salts before bed. Studies have shown that magnesium can be absorbed through the skin, but you will need to use a generous amount of salts for any benefits (at least 250g per bath). A warm bath earlier in the evening also helps the body cool down before bedtime, which is another signal to your brain that it's time for sleep.



BEAUTY BUZZ EYE CREAMS

The delicate skin around eyes needs particular care because it is thinner than on the rest of the face. Of course, nothing produces bright eyes more than sleep, lots of water and less alcohol, and a good SPF, but the latest formulations tackle concerns such as dark circles, fine lines, puffiness and bags. Made with the herb long life from Okinawa, Bareminerals Skinlongevity Vital Power Eye Gel Cream (£23, bareminerals.co.uk) helps protect the moisture barrier, leaving the eye area more resilient. Katherine Daniels Multi-Tasking Eye Balm (£32, katherinedanielscosmetics.com) contains brightening plant extracts to combat dark circles. If puffiness is your problem, try Inlight Under Eye Revive (£49, inlightbeauty.co.uk) with its decongesting organic ingredients. Extract of chestnut leaves in Korres Castanea Arcadia Anti-Wrinkle & Firming Eye Cream (£36, johnbellcroyden.co.uk) helps to prevent and smooth lines.

health notes



NEW FAVOURITE

Inspired by the British countryside and made in Somerset, the essential oils in Bramley Fern Body & Hair Gift Set (£50, brambleyproducts.co.uk) will energise your morning shower, while the flower-adorned packaging is a bright addition to the bathroom shelf.

Boost your wellbeing the natural way with our round-up from the world of health and beauty

IF YOU'VE GONE TO THE EFFORT of growing your own fruit and vegetables, then *Grow, Cook, Nourish* (Kyle Books, £30) is the book to help you get the maximum nutrition out of the season's harvest. Ballymaloe's Darina Allen has created more than 500 healthy recipes and also includes growing and harvesting advice.

HELP PROTECT TEETH from acidic food and drinks with new Colgate Enamel Strength Toothpaste (£4.49, from supermarkets). The formulation helps replenish and seal enamel.

A RECENT REPORT found that half of women experiencing the menopause are too embarrassed to talk to their GP about their symptoms. A. Vogel, producer of Menopause Support supplements (£14.99, health food stores), has a free seven-day plan with diet and exercise advice at avogel.co.uk/join. For more tips and products, visit netdoctor.co.uk.

NATURE'S MEDICINE CABINET

Rosemary This herb has a long association with memory – ancient Greeks wore garlands of it to improve their thinking, and Ophelia in *Hamlet* says, 'There's rosemary, that's for remembrance.' Now science is backing up the ancient wisdom – a recent study found that children performed 5-7 per cent better in memory tests when working in a room scented with rosemary essential oil. It's also thought to stimulate hair follicles when massaged into the scalp. Adding sprigs of rosemary to a bath or massaging the essential oil (diluted in a carrier oil) may help those who have cold hands and feet.*





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Stride out into the autumn countryside to boost your health, help protect against disease and lift your mood

WORDS BY ANNE MONTAGUE

If the health benefit of walking could be bottled, it would be seen as a wonder drug. In fact, it's been estimated that if more people walked further every day, they could save the NHS almost £2 billion a year. New research suggests that walking as much as possible in everyday life could be better for you than gruelling gym workouts in between bouts of being sedentary. Here are some of the amazing advantages of simply putting one foot in front of the other...

BOOST HEART HEALTH

Walking 2,000 extra steps a day cuts your risk of developing heart disease and stroke by eight

per cent – that's the equivalent of just 20 minutes' walking on top of your normal activity. Double it to 40 minutes and you can reduce your risk by between 16 and 20 per cent. Other research has shown that walking is even better than running for lowering your chances of getting high blood pressure, cholesterol and heart disease.

LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE

Leave the car keys at home and walk to work instead. When experts at University College London and Imperial College surveyed how 2,000 people made their way to their jobs, they found that those who



Autumnal country walks are good for the body and the soul

walked, cycled or took public transport were less likely to be overweight and had a 17 per cent lower risk of high blood pressure than those who drove.

REDUCE BREAST-CANCER RISK

When researchers followed nearly 60,000 women for a period of four years, they found that those who exercised for the equivalent of four hours a week – just 35 minutes' walking each day – were less likely than sedentary women to develop breast cancer. But it's important to keep going. Women who had been active and stopped over five years earlier were 16 per cent more likely to develop cancer than women who stuck with the exercise.

STABILISE BLOOD SUGAR

Make time for a post-dinner stroll. US researchers discovered that walking after eating a big meal reduced the spikes in blood sugar that can lead to the development of type 2 diabetes. Other studies show that walking for half an hour every day could cut your risk by 30 per cent or more.

IMPROVE GUT HEALTH

It's thought that exercise helps to keep you 'regular', which means that cancer-causing substances in undigested food pass through your bowel more quickly. One study found that walking for an hour each day may lower bowel cancer risk by 25 per cent. Regular exercise also reduces the levels of insulin and other hormones thought to encourage the growth of tumours.

KEEP YOUR BRAIN SHARP

Exercise is the number one thing you can do to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. As well as helping to lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and keeping blood vessels healthy, aerobic exercises such as brisk walking have been shown to have a direct ➔

DITCH THE SHOES

Swap trainers for bare feet and you could improve your posture while you connect with nature. "Going barefoot strengthens the muscles in the arch of the foot, which helps to realign your body and makes you walk more upright," explains osteopath Gavin Burt (backsandbeyond.co.uk). "It's also fantastic for your sense of balance. Feeling the ground through your feet stimulates the nervous system and reminds you to stand up straight." Choose your path carefully – a blustery autumn beach is a good start – or head for a designated bare-foot walking path, such as at The Trentham Estate in Staffordshire (trentham.co.uk).



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Studies show walking in green spaces is beneficial for mental health



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY. ADDITIONAL RESEARCH BY KATE LANGRISH. HAND-LETTERING BY RUTHROWLAND.CO.UK

effect on the brain. In one study, a year of this type of exercise resulted in an increase in the size of the hippocampus, the key brain area involved in memory. The increase was the equivalent of reversing one to two years of age-related shrinkage. Several studies have shown that people perform better on tests of memory and attention after or during exercise.

STRENGTHEN BONES

Step up your pace and you're less likely to get a hip fracture, too. US researchers found that walking briskly for around four hours a week could build bone and cut the risk of a hip fracture by 41 per cent.

LIFT YOUR MOOD

As well as the energy boost that comes from stimulating your circulation and increasing the supply of oxygen to cells about your body, walking also helps you feel better mentally and emotionally. It kickstarts the release of feel-good endorphins, and studies have shown that moderate

exercise can be as effective as anti-depressants for treating mild to moderate depression.

GET STARTED

Just putting on your trainers and heading out to your local park or along a country path is the simplest way to start, but for maximum benefit you will need to build speed and stamina. Follow a four-week walking programme* to get you going.

HEAD FOR THE HILLS

Adding a few inclines from gentle, undulating hills makes your muscles work harder and strengthens bones more than walking on the flat. And while walking up is the hard part, the good news is that walking back down is good for you, too. An Austrian study of hikers in the Alps found that going uphill cleared fat from the blood, while going downhill helped to stabilise blood sugars and worked less-used muscles around the hips. 🇬🇧

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Good Housekeeping



prima

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26 September – 1 October Red Smart Women Week

From business breakfasts to fitness sessions, beauty masterclasses to networking evenings, Red brings you five days of events to inspire you to live smarter. Speakers include Yotam Ottolenghi, Jody Shield and Alice Temperley.

Week-long event

27 September Good Housekeeping presents 60-Minute Cooking Skills – Kerala Fish Curry

Avoid the rush hour by taking a quick cookery course – fresh fish steeped in exotic spices, with wine tips on what to drink to bring out the flavour. Learn a new recipe in an hour and take it home for dinner!

6-7pm

2 October Country Living Build A Business Day

Turn your talent into profit, with expert advice, confidence development and insider tips on how you can start and grow your business. Full day, includes lunch, refreshments, business information folder and a goody bag.

9.30am-4.30pm



12 October Country Living Have The Confidence To Start Your Own Business

Get advice from life coach and author of *Start Your Dream Business*, Carole Ann Rice, followed by networking with the *Country Living* team and budding entrepreneurs.

Includes a glass of fizz and canapés.

2.30-6.30pm

19 October Join us at the GHI Autumn Comfort Food demonstration

Expand your Autumn repertoire with the GH cookery experts as they demonstrate indulgent suppers and seasonal fruity bakes.

6-8.30pm

9 November An evening of stress-free, festive entertaining with the Good Housekeeping Cookery Team

The GH Cookery Team demonstrates prepare-ahead festive dishes, including memorable canapés and showstopping desserts, while you enjoy a glass of bubbly.

6-8.30pm



23 November Good Housekeeping Masterclass: In Conversation with Yotam Ottolenghi and Helen Goh

Discover the secrets of Yotam Ottolenghi's famous desserts as he launches his cookbook, *Sweet*. Tickets include drinks on arrival and a GH goody bag.

6.30-8.30pm

28 November Good Housekeeping Masterclass: In Conversation with Barbara Taylor-Bradford

With over 81 million copies of her books in print, don't miss the chance to hear all about her latest novel, *Secrets Of Cavendon*, from Barbara Taylor-Bradford (far left) herself.

6.30-8.30pm

30 November An Evening of Beauty & Bubbles with Prima

Join the Prima team for a glam evening full of fun and laughter. Enjoy express beauty treatments, expert advice and lots of fizz! British actress and beauty expert Kazia Pelka (right) will be on hand to answer your beauty-related questions.

6.30-8.30pm



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GAZE KIMONO (left) CL Price £41.85

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PALAZZO TROUSERS CL Price £52.65 (usually £58.50) Available in Midnight (shown) and Black. XS-L1 (10-18), 78cm/30" (in seam)

HERMES TUNIC (right) CL Price £48.60

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CLARENCE TUNIC

(left) CL Price £48.60 (usually £54) Available in Olive Black (shown) and Cambridge Blue XS-L3 (10-22), Front: 70cm/27", Back: 78cm/30"

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FLORET TUNIC (right) CL Price

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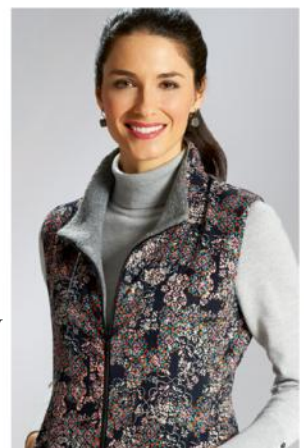


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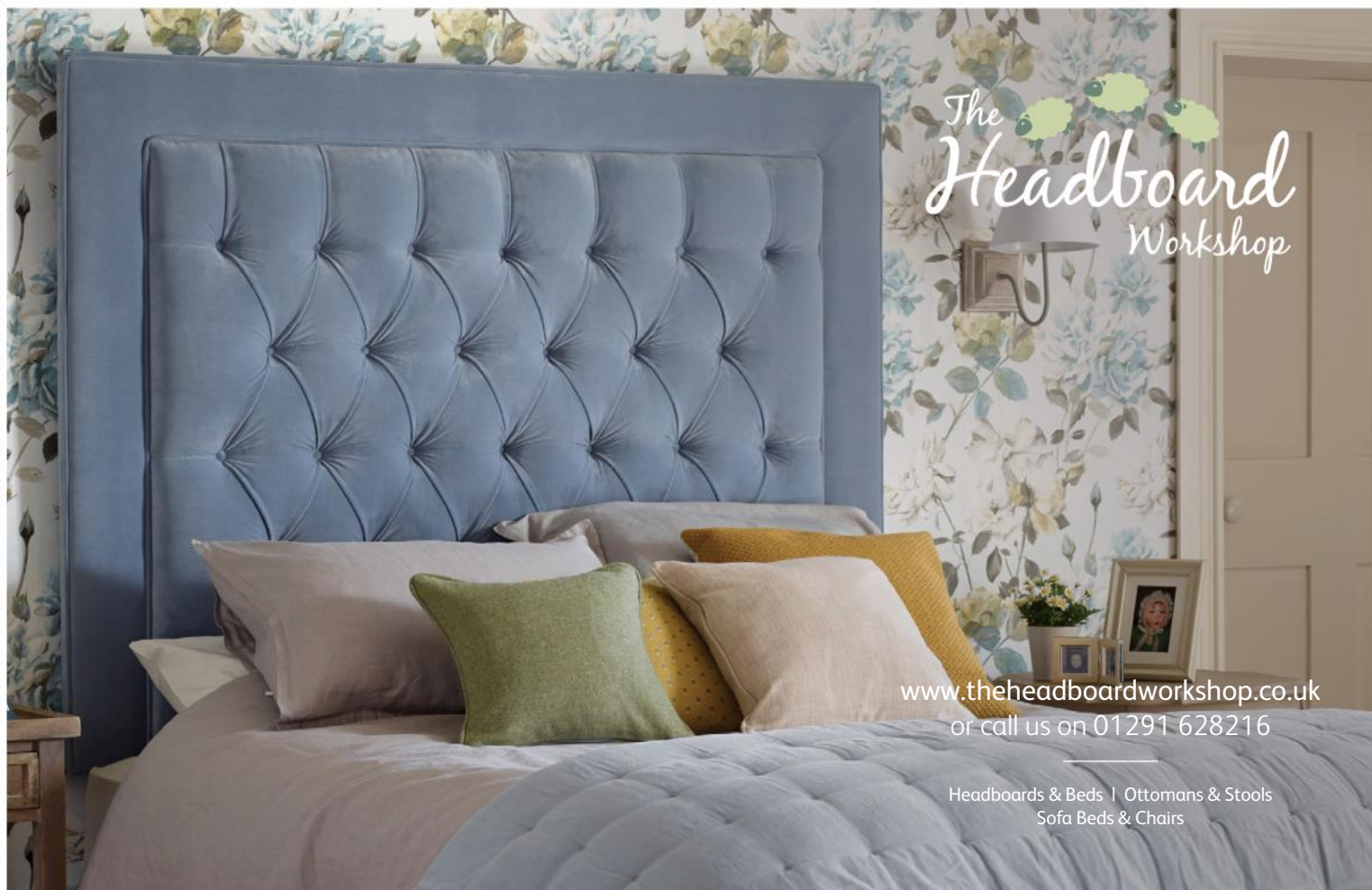
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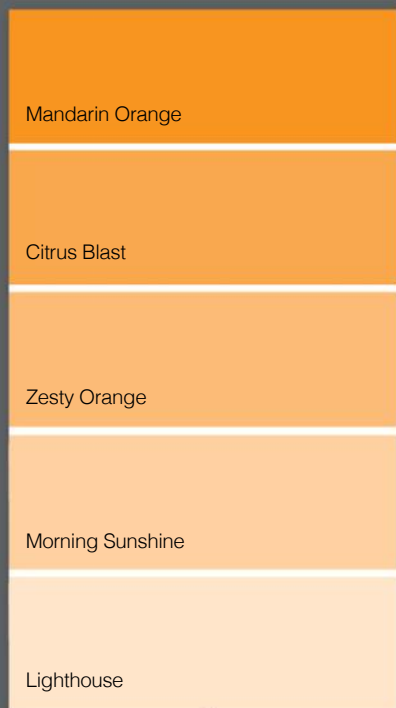


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At this time of year, Reverend Coles enjoys taking countryside walks and the glut of curly kale parishioners share with him



MY COUNTRYSIDE REVEREND RICHARD COLES

The vicar of Finedon, broadcaster and musician discusses the importance of community

I have always had a certain affection for the overlooked and unadmired, and I think Northamptonshire is both – a real Cinderella county.

My family are all from Finedon and Burton Latimer, so I've always felt very loyal to the place. I thought I'd stay in London but then I saw an advert for this parish in the *Church Times* and just had one of those moments of recognition. I was interviewed for the job, got it and came back.

I love walking my four dachshunds in the woods and seeing the changing colours. Forward motion clarifies my thoughts, so I often mutter to myself as I go. Recently, I was rehearsing a tricky conversation I needed to have, and it was only after several minutes that I realised that someone was walking on the other side of the hedge. I think they just put it down to the vicar talking to himself again.

Some of my parishioners are brilliant growers. They kindly leave

bags of tomatoes on the doorstep, or curly kale at this time of year. I love the garden but I've never picked up a spade. That is my partner David's department; mine is the cooking. I'm more ambitious since I did *Masterchef*.

I love to add new things to traditional dishes and hate throwing food away, so enjoy 'fridge-end' suppers using up the scraps. The glut of curly kale is proving a challenge, though.

My mum grew up in Scotland and spoke about it with such romantic affection that it must have transmitted itself to me, but I didn't actually visit until I was in the band [The Communards].

I fell in love with the country the minute I got there. Our annual retreat is in the west on the Kintyre peninsula – I can't think of anywhere I'm happier. We stay in a corrugated-iron cabin on a beach. It

overlooks rockpools that are visited by oystercatchers; there are sea otters and a heron that goes fishing. Sometimes, if you're lucky, you can look out to the Isle of Arran and Ailsa Craig, and see a pod of whales. It's a beautiful place.

I like to think the church lightly organises the innate goodness in people in such a way that the elderly are looked after, the sick are visited and children are allowed to flourish.

It's difficult for us to sustain and fund what we do in this parish and I know it's even harder for others. We are managing now, but my concern is who will do this work in the future? Part of my job as vicar is to promote the value of the church in supporting communities.

I wish more attention was paid to the voices of people in rural areas. Media conversation is very much focused on cities, but if you take the time to discover what's happening in somewhere like Finedon, much that's noteworthy or praiseworthy isn't really reported. It's important to think about what constitutes a community, to protect those things that hold it together and celebrate them more.

As a rural parish priest, I've found that housing is a continuing problem.

In my work for a housing association,

I deal with those who have been hit by changes in welfare and are vulnerable to an economic system that doesn't always work to their benefit. I understand the aspiration to buy your own home but some will never have the means to do that. It would be good if the government could support organisations, like ours,

that are trying to help the poorest. 

People in my parish kindly leave tomatoes on my doorstep

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I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IMPRESSED AND INSPIRED... *by the small-business owners we include in the pages of *Country Living* Magazine each month. Whatever their venture, they are talented and driven, finding*

fulfilment by turning their passion into their profession. Thus, on meeting them, I'm taken aback when they play down their achievements and underestimate their skills. So it is for them, and anyone else struggling to find the nerve to put their entrepreneurial dreams into action, that we created this mini-magazine. The content comes from our new book – see page 32 for more details. We hope it gives you the confidence to take that all-important first step towards turning your hobby into your business.

Pury Smith

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, *COUNTRY LIVING* MAGAZINE

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Finding your confidence

It can be illusive and at times we could all do with a little more of it. Here's our guide to having more faith in your abilities

From the inspiring business owners we feature in the magazine each month to the entrepreneurs that take part in our Build-a-Business Days, at *Country Living* we're lucky enough to meet hundreds of creative, hard-working people who are turning their hobbies and passions into jobs that they love. Their stories are always varied and interesting but we were surprised to discover that many have one thing in common – when starting out, the biggest obstacle they faced wasn't writing a business plan or mastering social media – it was overcoming self-doubt and believing in their own talents and abilities. It's

because of this that we decided to dedicate a whole book in our *Turn Your Hobby into a Business* series to helping them, and others like them, overcome their fears and go on to achieve great things. (Find out about the book and where to buy it on page 32.) Taken from it, this extract is a step-by-step guide to overcoming the all-too-common feeling that everyone else is more qualified than you – otherwise known as imposter syndrome.

1 IDENTIFY THE DOUBTFUL VOICE

The best way to overcome the feeling that you don't belong, or that everyone else is more deserving of success than

you, is to identify who is accusing you of these things in the first place. The likelihood is that it is no one but yourself. Once you acknowledge this, it makes that negative voice much less powerful and therefore a lot easier to ignore. Recognise as well that everyone suffers with feelings of self-doubt from time to time, even those who you would presume never struggle with self-confidence: *Country Living* editor-in-chief Susy Smith's memory of when she first started at the magazine, for example, will resonate with many: "On day one, I got in really early and sat down in my office, looking out at the rows of desks and chairs where my team would be

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sitting when they arrived. I thought to myself, 'What am I doing? I've never been an editor. How will I know what to do? They've got the wrong person.'" Over her 22 years at the helm, Susy has come up with a simple, but effective, remedy: "I realised I just needed to relax and trust myself. Mostly I'm okay, but every now and again, without warning, I will have an internal wobble. Basically, it's like climbing a mountain – it's fine if you don't look down. So long as I do what comes instinctively without thinking too hard about it, it usually works."

2 SEE THE BRIGHT SIDE
 "The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt." Philosopher Bertrand Russell's pithy summary of the situation highlights the reason why anyone suffering from imposter syndrome has plenty to be confident about. Rebecca Kirk of Coach for Creatives (coachforcreatives.co.uk)

believes it's also a sign of being a principled person: "It means you have integrity and strong values. These are great qualities in an entrepreneur." To support this, she cites Toronto-based leadership coach Tanya Geisler's advice: "Self-doubt is proof of your humanity, not your inadequacy." So it pays not to become too stressed about the fact you are experiencing a feeling of unworthiness and

acknowledge the qualities the condition reveals.

3 OWN YOUR SUCCESS
 Modify your modesty and credit ability and effort, rather than luck, for your achievements. All too often, we praise serendipity over our own hard work for helping us reach a particular position, but in doing so we undermine our own talent. Remember that we are all





presented with decisions to make, but it is the ability to choose well and make a success of the situation that turns them into an opportunity. In the same vein, when congratulated on our product or service, women are particularly prone to dismiss the comments, but what we should do is listen and absorb the positive response to help build up our confidence. "Accept

some praise – it will create momentum," Rebecca Kirk advises.

4 DON'T WORRY ABOUT TICKING ALL THE BOXES

No entrepreneur starts out with everything at their fingertips, but the feeling of inadequacy – one of the main symptoms of imposter syndrome – will tell you that you should. "It's our sense that everyone else has all the answers and expert knowledge, and somehow we are bluffing and busking our way through it," says life coach Carole Ann Rice of The Real Coaching Company (realcoachingco.com), who has worked with CEOs and company directors suffering from imposter syndrome. "This is not a reality but a fear. You have all you need to make a success of your business, but allow yourself to learn as you go." Rebecca Kirk agrees: "Don't wait until you are fully qualified, more experienced, more this or more that. Sometimes it's best just to leap and the net will appear." Essentially,

worrying you're not 100 per cent ready is just one among countless bad reasons for procrastinating about launching your start-up.

5 QUIT THE COMPARISONS

It's a temptation throughout many areas of life, but juxtaposing how you feel with the way someone else appears won't stand up to scrutiny for the simple reason that it isn't an accurate comparison. It is probable that concealed beneath the apparently confident exterior of a fellow business owner giving a talk is a dry mouth, a racing heart and a mind full of doubts like yours. If someone is giving the impression they are entirely comfortable with such a situation, they have almost certainly achieved that illusion through polishing their presentation skills, which is something you can easily do, too. Just visit mindtools.com and search 'presentation skills'. *Turn the page to read about inspiring women who have believed in themselves and achieved great things.*

My family and other animals

Looking for a new direction, Michaela Corrie and her mother embarked upon a project that would end up changing both their lives

WORDS BY **RACHAEL OAKDEN** ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ALUN CALLENDER**

Can you see the cow? It's a question Michaela Corrie never tires of overhearing when she's showing her textiles and furnishings at interior design shows. At first glimpse, her signature fabric – navy and cream on heavy linen-union cloth – is an on-trend geometric print. Some people see butterflies; others mistletoe. But look closer (and most viewers need to be prompted) and you'll spot cows' heads arranged in groups of four, like petals round a flower. "It's a classic circles-and-diamonds pattern," says Michaela, a graphic designer whose first fabric was inspired by cows grazing on her neighbour's

farm in Cumbria's Eden Valley. "I could never design a floral chintz – I'm too constrained by my love of symmetry."

Her graphic eye is balanced by the creative talents and intuitive approach of her business partner, Lesley Elston. The daughter of a court dressmaker who worked on Wallis Simpson's wedding dress, Lesley is a skilled needleworker with a flair for colour and a penchant for luxurious textures. She's also Michaela's mother, which is how she gets away with teasing her for being unable to sew on a button (for the record, Michaela denies this).

It is less than two years since the pair launched

Cabbage & Curtainrail, the made-in-Cumbria fabric-and-furnishings brand they created in memory of Michaela's late father, Peter. Yet they have already caught the eye of investors and international designers with their contemporary prints. As well as the cow motif, there's a diamond design based on minimalist sheep, a dotty arrangement of ewes' heads and an elegant interplay of pheasants.

The company is named after two donkeys whose adventures made up the childhood bedtime stories told by her father. "He was eccentric, and we were very close," says Michaela, the ➡

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"WHEN SOMEONE
TELLS ME THAT I CAN'T
DO SOMETHING, IT
MAKES ME MORE
DETERMINED!"



middle child between two brothers. Sadly Peter died of chronic asthma in 2010 – a month later, the house he'd shared with Lesley was burgled. "Mum had a bit of a breakdown after that, so she moved in with us," Michaela remembers. During the time Lesley lived with her daughter, the women talked about going into business. "One night I sat bolt upright in bed, thinking: 'Whatever we do, it has to be called Cabbage & Curtainrail!'" Michaela says. Lesley was already making cushions and homeware, and

selling them at craft fairs, and Michaela's sense of pattern gave them an edge. However, they soon found themselves unable to fulfil repeat orders because they couldn't reliably source materials. "In the fabric world, patterns change every season and no one has any old stock," Michaela says. "But when someone tells me I can't do something, it makes me more determined!"

A graphic designer since the age of 16 – she started work in her family's Carlisle printing firm and has been self-employed since her twenties

– Michaela started playing around with patterns: "One evening, I was doodling and came up with a cow's head. I flipped it, then flipped it again, and was struck by how it worked." Knowing that the Cumbrian setting was a selling point, she wanted to reflect the rural environment, so spent a week perfecting Cumberland Cow: the 'crisp' monochrome cow's head repeated in a circular pattern: "I noticed that I couldn't see the cow any more and realised that was our USP." Inspired by the pheasants that roam the Corby Castle estate, ➔





near Carlisle, on which she rents a cottage with her husband Andrew and daughters Phoebe, 11, and Scarlett, eight, Michaela set to work on the elegant Pheasant & Feather design, then completed her collection with Cumbrian Sheep. Next, they contacted Stead McAlpin, a local textile-printing firm with a 175-year history (it made fabrics for Queen Victoria and helped furnish the *Titanic*). “We booked a colouration session in their digital studio,” Lesley remembers. “When the designer showed us each pattern in different colours, we were amazed.” They got a few

rolls of linen union printed, and converted a room in Lesley’s house into a sewing room.

When they launched Cabbage & Curtainrail at a show near Penrith in 2015, the response was overwhelming: “We had Mum’s cushions, and Dad’s old armchair upholstered in our fabric as a centrepiece.” Nearly two years on, the buzz created by that show is growing into a roar. Last spring, when they exhibited at a London trade show, one designer, upon seeing the subliminal cows and sheep, exclaimed, “We’re done with flamingoes and palm trees.” Encouraged, Michaela then fired off the email that

changed their lives: “I wrote to the owner of Stead McAlpin, not expecting a reply. We were invited to see them and haven’t looked back since.”

That *Dragon’s Den*-style meeting resulted in the company going into partnership with Cabbage & Curtainrail, so Michaela and Lesley can now concentrate on new designs without worrying about how they’re going to finance a print run. “It blows my mind that all this has come from a doodle,” Michaela says. “Dad would be thrilled.”

For more details, visit
cabbageandcurtainrail.co.uk.

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Q&A

MICHAELA CORRIE CO-FOUNDER OF CABBAGE & CURTAINRAIL

Do you think that being self-employed is becoming more common?

I feel that more and more people are gaining the confidence to carve out their own career by starting niche businesses. I've been self-employed from a young age and, to me, the business world is all about forming strong working relationships that enable you to deliver your service with confidence from start to finish. People will see how much you care about it and respect you more for that.

What is the best thing about being your own boss? The freedom. Being able to schedule my workday around other priorities helps me focus on what's really important. I'm free to be myself, too. That often means I'm working in joggers with my hair scraped back, but I enjoy the odd times a corporate face is required. I'm also constantly challenged to be creative, which gives me great satisfaction.

What was the biggest change when going from an office job to being self-employed?

Working in graphics, I was tied to my computer and would rarely leave the office – it was heads down, get the job



done. In a way it has been difficult to be the face of my new business – especially at shows and in the media, as I'm not naturally inclined to want to be in the spotlight. I'd rather just be at home "colouring in", as my husband would say.

When starting out, what was your biggest challenge?

I've had many! At the start, it was hard to work out what was really essential to the business rather than something I wanted personally. We looked into renting a small unit, but in the end we decided to use my house as the workshop to save money. Despite my grievances, the cost saving was worth it, as we were able to redirect any profit from sales straight back into ordering fabric. Another issue was deciding which colourways to use – you want to keep up with latest colour schemes, yet offer timeless, classic collections.

What part of your business is most rewarding?

It has been great to see my sketches and drawings being printed on gorgeous linen fabric at a local mill, then sold and used in people's homes. It is incredibly humbling to hear that someone loves a product you created.

“One day or
day one.
You decide”

PAULO COELHO



It's not just you...

These successful businesswomen share the confidence challenges they have had and how they overcame them



HELEN AHPORNSIRI creates intricate designs from foraged foliage

I found living in London, working full-time and doing freelance illustration in the evenings really difficult, so, after a few years and several panic attacks, I decided to move home to Eastbourne and get a part-time job in a shop. I hated it, but the fact that I didn't like it motivated me to focus on my illustration work. I started doing it full time three years ago and now have a studio in the Sussex

countryside. I spend most days picking and pressing wild flowers and ferns, and then using them to create detailed pictures.

I lack confidence most of the time, but in a way I like fear because it pushes me to be better. You might get too comfortable and complacent otherwise. When I first started, I remember thinking, 'Can I really turn this into a full-time job?' But it worked out okay. Before starting a new project, I always do a lot of research, because then I'm more confident and feel other people can be confident in me, too. I also think it's important to take time to produce the things you want to make on a personal level. Do something you love because your passion will help you stand out professionally. helenahpornsiri.com

"BEFORE STARTING A NEW PROJECT, I DO A LOT OF RESEARCH BECAUSE THEN I'M MORE CONFIDENT"



LAURE MOYLE is founder of Pudding Fairy

I left a high-pressured job in the corporate world to start my patisserie and chocolate business: Pudding Fairy. I wanted

to create celebration cakes that would make my customer's big day just that little bit more special.

When you're setting up your own business, a lack of confidence goes with the territory. I don't even think it's something experienced more by men or women – it's a universal feeling.

Working for someone else doesn't come with the same amount of pressure as working for yourself. At the beginning I found it so daunting, but going outside your comfort zone is the only way to see what you can really achieve.

Last year I took part in the first series of the BBC's *Bake Off: Crème de la Crème*. It was probably one of the biggest challenges I've ever put myself through! It was hard, but an incredible experience, although it didn't really go to plan... It gave me a lot of perspective, though. When I've had a tough week with a high volume of orders, I go back to that day and think, 'If I can get through that, I can get through anything.'

puddingfairy.com



LOUISE MONEY is founder of Louise Money Originals and sells hand-painted cards inspired by British wildlife

Before setting up my own business, I owned a restaurant on the north Norfolk coast for 14 years. I had loved painting since I was a child, so when I sold up in 2014, I decided to revisit that passion. Having created cards for friends and family, I tentatively put some of my work on Facebook and was surprised and overjoyed

when people liked it.

Following that success, I set up an Etsy shop. It took off, which was great, but having more exposure also showed me that although some people liked my work, not every potential customer or stockist would. Art is such a personal and subjective thing, so having that negative feedback really knocked my confidence. But over time I grew a thicker skin and started to appreciate that just because one person or shop isn't interested in my work, it doesn't mean it isn't any good – rather that it might just not be to their taste. Now I know how important feedback is to my business because it helps me adapt and create things that people love.

etsy.com/uk

"AT THE BEGINNING I FOUND IT SO
DAUNTING BUT GOING OUT OF YOUR
COMFORT ZONE IS THE ONLY WAY TO SEE
WHAT YOU CAN REALLY ACHIEVE"



KATE JENKINS is founder of
Gower Cottage Brownies

I was a stay-at-home mum when I began selling my brownies at the local shop. We live in a beautiful area popular with tourists, who loved them, so I entered The Good Food Awards and won! After that, I set up a basic website and wrote a press release. Then I researched top food editors and sent them the release with a box of brownies. I thought if I could make just £10 a week, I could buy my own wine! Ten years on, we now have more than 16,000 customers, plus supply Wimbledon and the Welsh Rugby team. At first I thought, "Am I allowed to do this?" The council came to see me and I worried, 'I have small children here; I have cats!' But it all worked out okay.
gowercottagebrownies.co.uk

"FOR ME, THE FEAR
OF REGRET IS
BIGGER THAN THE
FEAR OF FAILURE"



ALI FOXON is a doctor of
environmental science but
now sells paintings through
Ali Foxon Art

I have always had a passion for nature and conservation, but it was while I was on maternity leave with my son that I decided to leave my career in environmental research and start painting. My work still focuses on the same themes but in a more creative way. Now I support organisations such as the National Trust

with my art. Starting a business was incredibly daunting, especially as I was changing career so completely and hadn't been to art school. It felt intimidating being back at square one, but I thought, 'Let's just see where this goes.'

One of the biggest hurdles was 'coming out' as an artist because a lot of people only knew me as a 'sciencey' academic. Putting yourself out there with a new venture makes you feel incredibly vulnerable – it's like a change in identity. You don't know whether people are going to respond positively or think you're having a mid-life crisis! It took a lot of courage but for me the fear of regret is bigger than the fear of failure. Taking little steps builds momentum, and it's the momentum that then grows confidence. If you're moving forwards it's hard to doubt yourself as much, whereas if you sit and think about the challenge ahead, you can talk yourself out of things.
alifaxonart.com



SARAH SHAKESPEARE is

founder of Saloukee Jewellery

I started my business in 2008 after three years in the design and fashion world. That time made me realise that no nine-to-five job would fulfil my ambition or enable me to be as creative as I wanted to be. It gives me such satisfaction to know I'm achieving the goals I set years ago, but it's taken patience, tenacity and a lot of determination. When I started, I wanted to change

"I'M A REAL WORRIER BUT HAVE FOUND WAYS TO USE SUCH TRAITS TO MY ADVANTAGE"

preconceptions of what jewellery could be made from, and last year my hard work paid off when Anthropologie stocked a range of my paper pieces.

We all struggle with self-belief, especially when setting out to conquer untrodden paths. I'm a real over-thinker and frequent worrier, but over the years have found ways to use these traits to my advantage. I always scribble my goals down, which is cathartic. You can then re-read your lists and realise what you've achieved. That spurs me on. I'd advise anyone feeling anxious to write down their goals, pin them to the wall and remind yourself why you're doing what you're doing. Ensure when you accomplish each one, big or small, you celebrate your success. And surround yourself with like-minded people who understand what you're trying to achieve. They'll pick you up on low days and hold you accountable to the things you promised yourself.

saloukee.com



LUCY PENDRICK creates felted animal sculptures through her business **The Whispering Wild**

When my sister gave me a felting kit, I wondered if I could create the wildlife I saw when out walking and so began experimenting. Then in 2014 I launched my business The Whispering Wild on social media.

I've suffered with anxiety and often worry that I'm not good enough. When I won a stall at the *Country Living* Pop-up Market, my first thoughts were, 'Why have they asked me? Have they got the right person?' The most important thing is to learn how to deal with self-doubt. I've found a group called Creative Women Together and, despite us being in a similar industry, there's no competition – we just spur each other on. *thewhisperingwild.co.uk*

Flavours from the flowers

Jan Billington left London to start an organic farm, but it is her edible blooms, home-grown in Devon, that have put her on the map

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY MYLES NEW

The Great British Bake Off isn't known for its inflammatory content, unless of course you are Jan Billington of Maddocks Farm Organics watching Paul Hollywood pluck your lovingly grown viola off a sponge cake and toss it aside. "And we had been so excited that a customer was a contestant!" Jan says. "We do have a still of Mary Berry eating one of our flowers, though," she adds. Mary's endorsement seems to have taken the edge off her co-host's behaviour, which, Jan admits, caused a bit of a tantrum in her household.

If you've ever eyed a floral garnish with uncertainty, you may well sympathise with Mr Hollywood. Beyond a bit of lavender in shortbread,

eating flowers remains a slightly 'out-there' culinary concept for your average home cook or restaurant patron. But Jan seems set to change that. For the past eight years, she's been popping edible blooms into the organic salad bags she grows for customers and restaurants on her five-acre farm near Cullompton in Devon – and in doing so has inspired chefs and bakers to incorporate them in imaginative ways: "I always shout at cooking contestants I see on television," she says. "Why use a viola to garnish steak when you have mustard flowers and garlic chives? Flowers that actually bring something to the dish."

Violas might not work with fillet steak, but their

heart-shaped petals are the perfect addition to the 'confetti' of phlox, calendula and rose blooms that Jan is using to decorate the buttercream frosting of a three-tier sponge at her garden table. Watching her at work in the sunshine, with her two Jack Russells, Pickle and Lily, at her feet, it's easy to envy Jan's life here. But, in reality, running an organic flower farm involves a lot of early starts and long days. Even with the help of her husband Stuart (who works in London two days a week), local student JJ and daughter Imy, who lends a hand at weekends, Jan rarely has time to stop. When not up at 5am waiting for the calendulas to open so she can begin ➡

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THE APPETITE FOR EDIBLE FLOWERS SHOWS NO SIGN OF ABATING



her morning's picking, she can be found in her kitchen developing recipes and making use of her collection of vintage recipe books. She might be working on a viola syrup as dark and rich as Merlot, or experimenting with jelly made with sweet woodruff flowers.

When Jan left her London job in arts management, moving to Devon in 2002 with Stuart (a philatelic specialist) and children Oli and Imy (now 19 and 16), her dream was to become an organic farmer. However,

after setting up her own vegetable-box scheme, she soon discovered that, despite a loyal customer base, one woman, five acres and a rotavator was no match for the average organic farmer and their John Deere. "I realised I needed to focus on higher-value, labour-intensive crops that were achievable for one person," she says. She turned to organic salad leaves and herbs, and, because edible flowers were a natural by-product of these – and of the companion plants grown alongside them to repel pests

– it made sense to make use of those, too. In 2006, when a chef at an Exeter hotel asked Jan to supply him with all the edible flowers she could, Maddocks Farm Organics found its niche. Every year since, Jan has increased her volume and last year demand was so great, they could have sold their stock three times over.

Fuelled largely by weddings, and small-scale artisan foodies such as craft beer and gin companies, cake makers and bakers, the appetite for edible flowers shows no sign of abating. ➡





and, as one of the only organic producers in the country, Jan is often the first port of call. “The organic element is essential,” she explains. “Over 90 per cent of flowers are imported, many from African countries where they will either be dipped or sprayed with insecticides.” There is also huge confusion over which flowers are edible and which aren’t; Jan’s list includes only those she is certain are safe to eat: “One florist asked me for sweet pea blooms for a wedding cake. I told her it would be

a short marriage since sweet peas are poisonous. I sent mangetout flowers instead.”

If gardening and growing is Jan’s first love, food is definitely a close second. Her imagination, however, often outstrips her own culinary skills, which means the relationships she has built with chefs, cooks and bakers over the years have become increasingly important. She loves to see their creations – grilled mackerel with purple borage and pink dianthus, or fennel flowers in domes of elderflower jelly – but isn’t

averse to telling them what she thinks they should try next. Last summer she found a marshmallow maker online and sent her a Jiffy bag of petals: “I had a feeling that rose marshmallows would taste amazing. She sent back a batch and they were phenomenal.” It’s clear that, as far as Jan’s concerned, when it comes to edible flowers, the possibilities are endless.

***📍 Maddocks Farm Organics,
Kentisbeare, Cullompton,
Devon (maddocksfarm
organics.co.uk).***

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Q&A

JAN BILLINGTON FOUNDER OF MADDOCKS FARM ORGANICS

Are you pleased you made the change in life direction?

We work harder now than ever and, although the flower side of things is joyful, the pressure of running a business and trying to find a balance is difficult. Having said that, I have the best job in the world and wouldn't change it.

If you did it again, what would you do differently? I'd have more self-belief, would be less critical of myself and wouldn't try to do everything on my own. At first, we grew organic vegetables and I was determined to do everything independently. That was mad given that I was alone with two children. Eventually, I found my niche was growing salads and edible flowers, but it was a learning curve and my confidence grew alongside my skills. That said, it was a while before I had the confidence to talk to chefs about supplying them. It took one finding me at a market and bullying me into supplying them before I really believed in what I was doing. If someone offers you a brilliant chance but you're not sure you can do it, say yes and learn to do it!

How did you cope with any nerves? I'm not very good with people, especially



those I don't know. I loathe public speaking, doing demos and any kind of TV work. But you have to grit your teeth and do it. I don't think it gets easier – you just get better.

How did you identify that your hobby could be made into a viable business? It's been a lot of trial and error.

You can't expect the final product to fit the exact idea you had when you started. To run a small business, you must be flexible and responsive to market demands: that is where success lies. Big companies may have money and marketing teams but the burden of bureaucracy is their downfall. A small business can say, "Let's give it a go and see what happens." If you're wedded to one idea, you risk missing opportunities that develop as your business does.

What advice would you give people thinking about taking a similar direction? You only live once, and to live doing something you don't enjoy or regretting missed opportunities seems mad to me. People work long, hard hours all their lives, so, if possible, why not put that effort into something you enjoy and care about?

“The only way
to do great work
is to love what
you do. If you
haven’t found it
yet, keep looking.
Don’t settle.”

STEVE JOBS



In summary...

So if you ever find yourself having a crisis of confidence,
just remember these key points below

1

RECOGNISE

that the only person
accusing you of being an
imposter is yourself

2

REMEMBER

that even the most
awe-inspiring business
owners have moments
of self-doubt

3

LEARN TO HAVE

faith in your instincts,
as it's these that will lead
you to success



EXERCISE

Carole Ann Rice of The Real Coaching Company recommends starting to log all those confidence-boosting conversations, testimonials, achievements, events and meetings, big and small, so that when you begin to have negative thoughts about being fraudulent and need an injection of self-belief in your abilities, your best entrepreneurial experiences are ready to hand. Written down in black and white, there's no arguing with the contents, so allow yourself simply to absorb the praise.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY IMAGES

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**12 October 2017; 2.30pm-6.30pm;
£45, including drinks and nibbles**



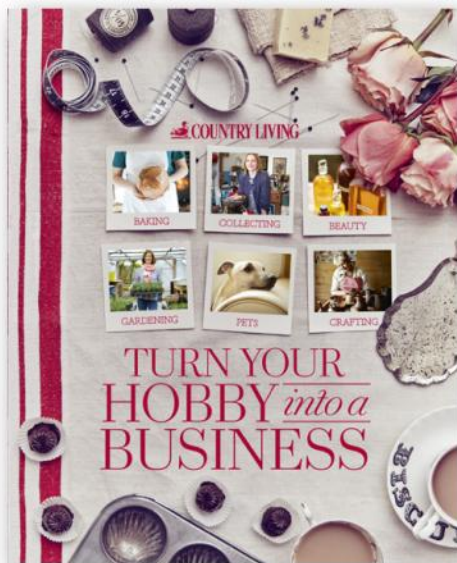
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